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IN STRANGE COMPANY.

Yours truly,
James Greenwood.

IN STRANGE COMPANY:

BEING THE EXPERIENCES OF A ROVING CORRESPONDENT.

BY

JAMES GREENWOOD,

"THE AMATEUR CASUAL."

94544

SECOND EDITION, WITH MUCH ADDITIONAL MATTER.

ILLUSTRATED WITH A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR, ENGRAVED ON STEEL.

LONDON:
VIZETELLY & CO., 42, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
1883.

GnD
824.8
Grc/Jns
94544

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.,
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

PREFATORY.

HEREIN I have ventured to string together, in book-form, a selection from my from time to time experiences, chiefly published in the columns of a London daily paper, because it seems to me that, when after much exercise of patience and overcoming of difficulty, any specially bad case of disease or deformity in our social system has been brought to light, it is a pity that its term of exposure to public contemplation—on which rests mainly its chance of cure—should last no longer than a single day. Besides, and apart from this, however widespread the influence of a newspaper may be, it cannot hope to include amongst its readers *all* who take an interest in the ways and means, the habits, haunts, manners, and customs of such members of the community as comprised the Strange Company I, one way and another, contrived to scrape acquaintance with.

I regard it as my duty to warn those who admire nothing so much as "fine writing," that it will be waste of time to seek for it within these covers. My Strange Company were not of the sort that take kindly to polish, being of a gritty race, and, individually, no more capable of refinement than a grindstone—human nettles that resent being dealt with gingerly or glove-handed. They have no notion of "dressing" for their photographs. You must take them in the rough or leave them alone.

In such manner I have taken them, and in the rough, and faithfully set down in this volume all that I learnt concerning them.

JAMES GREENWOOD.

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IN STRANGE COMPANY.

THREE OF TEN THOUSAND.

THE Angel at Islington, from which every minute almost through the livelong day omnibuses from all parts of London are setting down and taking up their loads of passengers, is a favourite hunting ground with the juvenile ragamuffin horde, who, for their sustenance, are driven to beg, or steal, or legitimately trade, as occasion may serve. Day and night you may find them there—paper boys, fusee boys, crossing sweeper boys, and boys out of number who are nothing in particular "at present," three-feet-high merchants, ruined through rash speculation, and "rubbing on" until a lucky windfall sends them a sixpence with which to go to market again; dirty, houseless, poor little gutter prowlers, who ever keep a bright look-out, are never downhearted, live on from day to day, and at night find shelter for their capless, unkempt heads, God only knows how.

You may always find them there; and there they were as that miserable winter's day, last Thursday, was closing in with drizzling rain that was ten times colder than snow. There they were, and it came into my head quite suddenly that an hour might be worse spent than in sampling the bulk and hearing from their own lips what were their present means and future prospects in that state of life to which hard fortune had doomed them.

As though divining my thoughts, at that moment there leaped out of the mud, right under my nose, one of exactly

the sort on which my mind was dwelling—a poor, shoeless, shuffling little wretch, whose entire suit consisted of a pair of manly trousers ingeniously secured by a single brace over a dilapidated shirt of the Guernsey order, and whose stock-in-trade was five or six cakes of boot blacking, contained in a box slung round his neck.

The box had no lid, and the rain was so rapidly liquefying the paper-covered cakes, that the one he held out for me to buy drooped across his mite of a hand—deadly white with cold where it was not black with grime—in a manner not calculated to tempt a person who was some miles distant from home, and who really was not urgently in need of blacking.

"Buy a a'porth," pleaded the small boy; "here yer are, take three on 'em for a penny; *that* won't hurt yer!"

Great was the boy's amazement when I bade him go and wait a little while for me at the corner of the next street, and I would show him how he might earn a shilling easily.

My next capture was a fusee boy, a little younger than my blacking boy; but I wanted still another, and presently I espied him, a red-haired boy, a sturdy, broad-nosed, freckled villain of eleven or so, who scorned trade, and was a lawless savage. When I set eyes on him he was in a fierce conflict with a boy older and bigger for possession of a crumpled-up paper of that evening's issue that someone had thrown from the roof of an omnibus. Encouraged by the cries of "Go it, Ginger!" yelled by his admiring friends, the red-haired boy presently finished his antagonist by scientifically butting him with his bullet head in the pit of the stomach, and bringing him to the ground; afterwhich Ginger retired to the pavement, and, waving his captured prize most aggravatingly before the eyes of the vanquished, with calm precision executed a war dance.

A quarter of an hour later we four—the blacking boy, the cigar-light vendor, Mr. Ginger, and the reader's humble servant—were comfortably bestowed in the parlour of a little alehouse in the Pentonville Road, with bread and cheese before us, and a glorious fire burning in the grate, in the fender of which my thrifty blacking-boy laid out his little stock to dry.

Ginger's delight when the landlord brought in, along with a big loaf, the half of a huge Cheshire cheese, was a sight to behold; his amazement when the landlord left the room, leaving the half cheese behind him, I will not attempt to describe.

"He's forgot it, ain't he?" he said, handling his knife as though sadly tempted to make the most of the innkeeper's mistake by slicing off a pound or so.

"No, he hasn't forgotten, my lad," said I, "he'll fetch it away when we have done with it."

"When we have done with it! What, are we going to eat as much as we likes on it?"

"Yes."

Ginger lost not a moment more. Licking his lips as I cut him a liberal slice, he pounced on it and on a hunch of bread with a degree of voracity that spoke of long fasting.

Ginger ate with his elbows on the table—nay, with both his arms and hands forming a jealous barrier round his food, just as the brown bear at the Zoological Gardens encircles with his paws the meal of biscuits the keeper throws to him in his den. As he munched each greedy mouthful, his fierce eyes marked the next in the crisp crust, in the luscious cheese that yielded but too faint a resistance to his grim semicircle of teeth. I can't say how much that half cheese weighed, probably thirty pounds, but it was evident that Ginger had promised himself that he would eat the whole of it, and the spasm of pain it caused him to see me help the other two was ludicrous to behold. The second, the third time, he thrust his plate for another helping, and still once again, and with a chuckle of triumph as the blacking-boy and the fusee-boy announced that they had had enough. The champing of his insatiable jaws was the only sound that was heard, while his mates sat silent and expectant of information as to what was the "job" I had spoken of. At last I ventured mildly to remark to Ginger—

"When you are *quite* full, my young friend——" To which he promptly responded—

"All right, guv'nor, I ain't a greedy cove; I'll knock off now, if you like," and bolting at a gulp about two square

inches of cheese that remained on his plate, he announced himself at my service.

I explained briefly that, in the first place, I wished to know where was their home, and what their means of living; and I first addressed myself to the blacking-boy.

"I am nine and a half," said he, "and I lives in Playhouse Yard in Whitecross street. It ain't a house, at least it ain't a house what you goes indoors to, with tables and chairs and that, and a fire."

"Ah, ah!" remarked Ginger; "no, there ain't much room for furniture in Billy Tagg's house, but it's werry comfortable, and, wot's more, it's regler. It's a barrer."

"A baker's barrer," poor little Taggs hastened to explain —"one of them with a lid. The baker lets me sleep there, and I watches out for the cats."

"For the cats?"

"It's down a yard with gates to it where the barrer is, and the baker he keeps breeding ducks and pigeons there, and the cats come and nail 'em o' nights, and when I hears 'em I gives the lid of the barrer a histe, and down it comes with a whack, and they are off like a shot."

"Are your parents alive?" I asked him.

"I ain't got no mother, I've got a father; I sees him sometimes. He don't live up my way, he goes to fairs and that. I ain't got no brothers. I've got a sister, she's in the hospital. She used to work up Mile End way, at the lucifer factory, till she got the canker making of 'em. She's been in the hospital this ever so long. That's why I don't sell 'lights.' I can't bear the sight of 'em. I'm on my own hands. I earns all I gets. I've been adoin' it ever since she was took to the hospital."

"Are you ever ill?"

"I hain't been ill a long time, not since the middle o' summer, when I had the measles. No, I didn't sleep in the baker's barrer then. I didn't know him. I knowed a pipe-maker, and he let me lay in his shed, and his missus was werry kind to me. I do werry well. I hardly ever goes without grub. I don't know what you mean by 'regler' grub. I most times saves three-half-pence for my breakfast, and this cold weather I gets a ha'porth of bread and a

penn'orth of pea soup; there's lots of shops what sells penn'orths of soup in Whitecross Street, ha'porths too. I sell out somehow every night. I gets a dozen cakes of blacking for tuppence-ha'penny, and I in general clears about fivepence. Dinner time I gets a baked tater, or sometimes a ha'porth of fried fish. All I got left, 'cept three-half-pence for breakfast and stock-money, we spends at supper-time.

"We goes together, four or five of us, sometimes to the soup shop, sometimes to the baked tater and fish shop. It's all right mostly; course there *is* hard times. Once a p'liceman took away my box, blacking and all, 'cos I cheeked him. It was more'n a week before I could make another start. I washes myself sometimes, not often; I ain't got no towel and soap. I don't recollect when the last time was. It was afore the frost, though, 'cos I know it was a wrench at the pump I had. Yes, sometimes I wears boots. I ain't had none since the last boat-race day, Cambridge and Oxford, and I lost one on 'em turning cat'n wheels behind a carriage."

"Were you ever in trouble?"

"I never was locked up; cert'ny *not*. Don't I think I should be better off in the workus? No, I don't want to be shut up anywheres. I am all right. I don't want nobody to be a-looking arter me like that; thanky all the same, mister."

"Can you read?"

"No, I can't read, nor write neither; I never was in a school. Never was in a church. I don't like to be shut up anywhere. I'd a jolly sight rather go on as I am a-goin'."

And so he retires to collect his blacking out of the fender with a dismal foreboding, as I can see, that he may, after all, in consequence of his sturdy determination to embark in no business that may involve his "being shut up," though for never so short a period, miss my "job" and the promised shilling after all.

The fusee-boy comes next; but his experiences are tame and common-place compared with those of the blacking-boy. He is a meek and spare-looking little chap, woefully ill-clad and dirty, and his age, as he informs me, is "summat about eight or ten." He refers to Ginger, who is a personal friend, for definite information on the matter.

Ginger opines that, as "nigh as a toucher, he was eight last birthday." The fusee-boy was better off than Billy Taggs, inasmuch as he had a mother and "regler lodgings;" but the advantage was not alloyed, for the fusee-boy's mother was what Master Ginger described as a "lushing, fightin' sort of woman, who was wuss than a scalded cat to them about her when the drink was in her."

"I'd rather be without a mother than have a oner like her," said the red-haired boy; "there's him and his two young brothers and sisters wot sells button'olers (flower sprigs for the button-hole), and she grabs all they earn, and gets drunk with the money, and punches them about orful 'cos they don't bring her more. Their only good time is when she is in quod. She is there now for twenty-one days, for ''saultin' a policeman on Christmas Eve. Good job if she was dead. Yah! yer young fool!" continued the ferocious Ginger, as the small pale boy raised to his dirty eyes his dirtier cuff; "he always snivels when you tell him that."

"Were his brothers older than himself?" I asked.

"One was older," the fusee-boy replied, "and one was two years younger, and they were all out selling lights. The sister was the eldest of all. Thirteen she was, but she wasn't very big because of her humpty back. She can't get no flowers now it's frosty, so she gets paper bags to make, and stops at home to look arter the wittles and that, agin we comes home at night."

"Are you out all day long, then?"

"All day long, up to about nine."

"But you go home to your meals?"

"There ain't no meals, 'cept the coffee in the morning, and what we gets when we gets home at night."

"And what do you then get?"

"Oh, all manners; stews sometimes," and his dirty little white face lit up at the glorious recollection.

"Jolly fine stews they are," put in the irrepressible Ginger; "I've paid my whack towards 'em, and joined in. We should ha' had one to-night, only his sister Becky hain't good on her pins when it's slippery, and it's a long way over to Bermondsey."

"Why to Bermondsey?"

"'Cos you can't buy bits and ears 'cept in the skin market."

"Bits of what and ears?"

"Bits of meat what they scrapes off the insides of the skins and the ears of the bullocks; stunnin' stew it makes with an ingun and a few taters."

"And how much a pound do you pay for the—the ears and bits?"

"Nothing a pound; you buys it in lots. Them wots got the priwilege cuts 'em off, and makes 'eaps of 'em on the pavement, about a couple of pound for two pence. That's how his sister Beck looks arter 'em when she's left to herself, yet he ses he shouldn't be glad if his old woman was dead!" And the red-haired boy disgustfully snorted his scorn for self-damaging weakness in general.

To the cigar-light boy I put the same questions as to the blacking-boy.

"Did he ever go to church?"

"No."

"To school?"

"No."

"Could he read or write at all?"

"No; he knew nothing about them things," the fusee-boy answered, listlessly.

"Ah, but he can do something wots a lot better!" exclaimed Ginger, with an admiring glance at his young friend; "he's a fizzer on the whistle."

"On the whistle?"

"The tin-whistle—don't yer know?" and taking up a long piece of bread-crust from the table he made on it the motions of a flûte-player; after which he put it in his pocket.

"He ain't got the cheek to go into public-houses and that, or else he might make a reg'lar good living of it."

There must have been something more than empty flattery in Master Ginger's eulogium of his friend's whistling powers, for the little pale boy brightened up wonderfully.

"Mister," said he to me, with much more animation than he had yet displayed, "did you ever hear that boy what plays in a coffee-pot?"

I was fain to confess that I was ignorant of the existence of the phenomenon in question.

"He don't mean *in* it, guv'nor; he means down the spout of it," explained the ready Ginger; "the chap he means goes about playing down the spout of a coffee-pot, just like as though it was a whistle. He very often makes a pitch in them streets that leads out of the Strand."

"And would you like to go about playing tunes on a coffee-pot?" I asked the little cigar-light boy.

"Better'n everything," returned the modest small musician; and, then, finding that I had nothing more to say to him, he joined the blacking-boy, who had by this time repacked his dry goods, and was now dozing by the fire.

"My name is John Galloper," remarked the red-haired boy, before he was asked the question, and folding his hands behind him, after the fashion of good little boys, when repeating a catechism lesson.

"And how do you get a living, John?"

"You don't want to hear no lies, mister."

"Certainly not."

"Then I don't get a living at all; I lets the living get itself."

"But you must either provide for yourself or somebody provides for you; which is it?"

"It's a kind of mixshure of both, I suppose," returned John Galloper, with a laugh, and, after a little reflection, "it comes somehow; I don't trouble *myself*."

"How old are you?"

"Older than you might think," answered John Galloper, with the wink of a middle-aged horse dealer; "I am thirteen last birthday."

"And you do no work?"

"I ain't above a job, if I tumble across it."

"Sometimes you beg?"

"Per'aps *you* might call it beggin'."

"Sometimes you steal?"

"Oh! come, yer know, you're a comin' it a little too hot now. It's a mixshure. I tell you you'd better call it a mixshure, and say no more about it. What's the job you brought me here to do, guv'nor?"

"Wait a little: where do you live?"

"I don't live anywheres. I ony lodges in Golden Lane—sometimes at the 'Nussery,' sometimes at Dunn's."

"Have you a father or a mother?"

"I d'n know; I hain't been to see this year and more. They don't care nothing about me, and I don't want 'em to."

"I tell you what, my young friend, it seems to me that unless you alter your ways there can be little doubt as to what the end of all this will be."

John Gallopper broke off a bit from the purloined crust in his pocket, and calmly masticated it as he looked up to the ceiling.

"You'll become a convict, and sent to drudge in misery to the end of your life in some stone quarry."

"Ah, all right," said John Galloper, evidently growing restless; "we'll see about that when we gets there. What's the job, master?"

"I didn't bring you here to preach to you, but I must tell you it is terribly distressing to find a little lad like you so reckless as to what becomes of him. If you could seriously——"

"Oh, that's enough of that. Don't you fret about me, mister; I knows my way about. *Now*, what's the job?"

There was no use in further talking, and so the "job" was at an end, very much to Mr. John Galloper's amazement when I announced the fact. So I gave them a shilling each, and let them go back to the mire where I had found them. I don't know if it was the effect of the cheese of which with my young friends I had partaken, or whether it was the influence of their strange company, but that night I lay much awake, thinking of poor Billy Taggs bemoaning the worry of cats as he tumbled and tossed in the friendly baker's barrow, and of the pale little fusee-boy, tucked as warmly as may be in his wretched bed by his little hunchback sister and dreaming of the genius of the coffee-pot, and of desperately wicked young John Galloper, and of what, one of these days, would inevitably come out of his pernicious "mixshure."

A MISSION AMONG CITY SAVAGES.

OUT-DINNING the din of the Whitecross Street Sunday morning market, the sound of a bell was heard distinctly—not the measured chiming of a church bell, not the peremptory clatter of a factory bell, but a fitful and uncertain ringing, now loud and hasty, and urgent, like a fire bell; now slow and laboured, like the ringing of a bell-buoy at sea.

A gentleman in the baked-potato interest, however, to whom I applied for information on the subject, ruthlessly stripped the bell of everything in the shape of romance.

"It is the Costers' Misshun bell," said he.

"And whereabouts is the Costers' Mission?" I asked.

"That's it over there," said he, pointing towards a tall building in the distance that towered above the houses. "Go down Golden Lane and turn up Hartshorn Court, and you'll come at it if you wants to."

I had no previous intention of "coming at" the building in question, but as soon as my attention was fairly directed to it, the idea immediately occurred to me, What a wonderfully fine view of this curious neighbourhood might be obtained from the flat of its tall roof?

Half an hour afterwards, thanks to the excellent gentleman to whom the Costermongers' Mission House owes its existence, I had mounted to the topmost storey, and stood on the snow-covered leads looking down.

There was the bell that had excited my curiosity, and at a glance was revealed to me the secret of its erratic behaviour. It is a large and handsome bell, but the way in which it is set ringing is singularly of a piece with the make-the-best-of-things-as-we-find-them system that prevails throughout the whole establishment. It is not hung after the orthodox fashion. It is humbly gibbeted on a rough-and-ready arrangement of wood and iron, and in season two boys of

the school, who by their exemplary behaviour have earned the glorious privilege, ascend to the roof and swing the bell to and fro while its great clapper bangs against its brazen sides.

Golden-lane, seen in looking down from an elevation of eighty feet or so, is very different from Golden-lane viewed from the pavement. In the latter case all that may be seen is the bare lane itself, and let the explorer beware that he uses his eyes not too diligently in this, beyond compare, the very ugliest neighbourhood in London—in all England. I know something of the "shady" parts of London and its environs. Spitalfields is very bad. Probably, in the event of a ruffian show, Flower and Dean-street, and Keate-street could produce specimens that would leave all other competitors far behind; but Spitalfields produces only ruffians of a certain type. Mint-street and Kent-street—those old plague-spots that disgrace and disfigure the fair face of the Borough of Southwark—teem with blackguardism and vice; but here, too, you find that the birds who here flock are strictly of a feather. Cow-cross, again, is a terrible place; but it is chiefly the hideous habitations and the extreme destitution of the inhabitants that make it so.

Golden-lane, however, with its countless courts and alleys, left and right, may truthfully boast of exhibiting each and every one of the objectionable characteristics above enumerated. Its thieves are the most desperate and daring in the world; it is rich in examples of that even more dangerous scoundrel, the "rough." Annually it yields its crop of coiners and smashers; it is the recognised head-quarters of beggars and cadgers; while, as for costermongers, they must be three thousand strong at the very least. It is the "slummiest" of slums. There are China-yard, Cow-heel-alley, Blackboy-court, Little Cheapside, Hotwater-court, and many a dozen besides, and as quaintly named, nestling closely about the feet of the gaunt and exteriorly uncomfortable-looking Costermongers' Mission House—originally intended for a model lodging-house; whose tall head and high shoulders of raw bricks rear high above the houses, by comparison dwarfing them to the dimensions of pig-sties and rabbit-hutches—hutches which such elegant bucks and does

as are exhibited at fancy shows would erect their silken ears in horror to behold.

Awful places! As far as the eye may reach—not very far, for high up as the roof of the Golden-lane building may be, the supply of pestilent mist from below is constant and steady—east, west, north, and south, is to be seen nothing but an intricate network of zig-zag cracks, chinks, and crevices, which really are courts and alleys threading among houses teeming with busy life, making it look as though what was once a solid block had been worm-eaten and burrowed and undermined like a rotten old cheese, and were now falling to pieces in misshapen ugly lumps.

The life that stirs in these black crooked lanes, not wider than the length of a walking-stick, scarcely seems human. Creatures that you know to be female by the length and raggedness of hair that makes their heads hideous, and by their high-pitched voices, with bare red arms, and their bodies bundled in a complication of dirty rags, loll out of the patched and plastered holes in the wall that serve as windows, and exchange with their opposite neighbours compliments or blasphemous abuse; or, shaking their bony fists, shriek down threats and curses on the juvenile members of their kind, who roll in the gutter and bite and scratch each other for possession of decayed oranges and apple that the resident costers throw out in the process of sorting.

Rough and coarse as he is, the costermonger is to be easily distinguished from his dishonest neighbour. There is an ease, a freedom of action about him that distinguishes him at home not less than abroad. His language is not choice, he is not scrupulously clean and tidy, occasionally he gets drunk; but in nine cases out of ten he remains to the end nothing more than a poor ignorant, hard-working fellow, always open to act on the most liberal interpretation of that convenient phrase, "trick of the trade," but, apart from this, absolutely honest—which is as much, and perhaps, considering his surroundings and how hard a thing at times it is to resist temptation, rather more than might reasonably be expected of him.

"But," the reader may say, "there is at least this consola-

tion in so wretched a neighbourhood, where all are so deeply plunged in poverty—there can be but very little of drunkenness. Intoxicating liquors are expensive luxuries."

Very expensive. A "quartern" of gin costs exactly as much as four pounds of bread. Nevertheless, within a circle of a furlong of the Mission House, the enormous number of *eighty-three* public-houses thrive and grow fat. It is computed that the same amount of space, affords homes and haunts and hiding and abiding places for rather over twenty thousand canting beggars, thieves, tramps, costermongers, small shopkeepers, everybody; and one may easily imagine the influence of such a prodigious outpouring of rum, and gin, and whisky on such an inflammable mass. It was in the midst of this sink of vice and drunkenness, and of every conceivable iniquity, that, eight years since, one man, single-handed and unaided, dared to set up his tiny tent and commence a crusade of reformation. That man was Mr. J. Orsman, and there he is still, encouraged by his successes, and patiently plodding, working at his business in business hours, but giving to the good cause, without fee or reward, his spare hours, Sunday and week-day.

"If you would like to drop in and see us on Tuesday," said my indefatigable friend, "we have a bread and meat supper. It is an annual affair. Our guests are the beggars and tramps from the lodging-houses round about. It isn't much—merely a little compliment in recognition of their good nature in allowing me to enter their kitchens, and say a few good words to those who choose to listen. I have the privilege of entering several of these places now, and I am glad to say that the owner rather encourages it than otherwise."

Accordingly, on Tuesday evening, I went and found the expectant company assembled. The place was very full. Below there is sitting accommodation for between two and three hundred, and above there is a gallery in which perhaps two hundred more might be seated. Upstairs was fair enough as regards the dress and general appearance of the company, but below, in the pit, as it were, it was anything but a pretty show. The seats were crammed, and, such is the amount of respect which the superintendent has won for himself

amongst even these, the very dregs of humanity, that the behaviour of the "supper party" was simply all that could be desired.

But the faces! It was impossible to look on them without considering the question, How can such as these be good? Of how many generations of neglect, of vice, and unvoidable grovelling at the foot of the social ladder, is this the result? At a glance it was evident that there had been no attempt amongst the members of the supper party to get themselves up for the occasion. The perfect understanding that existed between themselves and their entertainer rendered such a display of talent sheer waste of time.

They came "just as they were," though, if the reader infers from that phrase that they appeared in the Mission Hall just as they appear in public, he mistakes my meaning. They attended without their "business" masks. No face was puckered in pretended hunger pains, no eye rolled in unutterable misery, no jaws chattered an indication of a frozen interior. There was no whining, no make-believe, no humbug. I don't say that they were all beggars—probably not more than a third of them were—but what one in vain looked for was the "jolly beggar," the oft-quoted and steadfastly-believed-in personage who scorns work because he can "make" in a day three times the wages of an honest mechanic by the simple process of "cadging."

Is it a simple process? The evidence before me shewed exactly the contrary. Such of the motly company who graced the seats below, and who were beggars, were beggars in earnest—men and women who were old hands and experienced at the trade. How came it, then, that they were so desperately hard up and miserable, so dull-eyed and spiritless, so unmistakably hard-set in hopeless, helpless, conscious degradation? Where were the the big wallets of broken victuals with which, according to popular belief, the London beggar, after his day's prowling, invaribly wends his way home, cursing it for its bulk and weight, and scornfully flinging it aside as soon as he reaches his familiar boozing ken? Where were the pampered ruffians in rags, to whom the sleek landlord of the public house he honours with his patronage, cringed so servilely while he took his orders for

immediate brandy and water and goose with apple sauce to be cooked as speedily as possible for supper?

We read about such things, about cadgers' halls, and the desperate orgies to be witnessed in beggars' "kitchens." I am sure that I don't know where to find any such place at the present day. Judging from the appearance and behaviour of the bread and meat supper party, even the recollection of such splendid times must have faded from the memories of beggars of the present generation. Each and every one of the ragged, squalid, terribly dirty creatures before me—not the dirt of labour, but a smoky, ingrain grime, resembling the tarnish on neglected brass or copper—had come away from the great fire that invariably is kept burning in the common lodging-house kitchen, and had made a journey, long or short, through the snow and the biting wind in order to secure a meal of bread and meat.

Nor was that all. If there is anything more than another detestable to this sort of people, it is being talked to "for their good." It is no more than natural. They are so constantly in the habit of talking to other people for their own individual good, so distorting facts, and making the very utmost of the slenderest material to win the sympathy of their victims, that they get to regard every kind of exhortation and persuasion as cant, and themselves as too knowing to be taken in by it. Yet lured by the prospect of a pound of bread and a half a pound of cold meat, here they sat from eight o'clock till ten, without coughing, or shifting in their seats, or shuffling their feet, or in any other way betraying the yearning that all the time was gnawing them. It quite upsets one's preconceived ideas about the sort of life the professional London beggar leads, raising the suspicion that this much-abused fraternity, like honest folk, are liable to "hard up" seasons, and that occasionally the members of it are really the famished, shivering wretches they appear.

Not that a single penny of mine should ever be bestowed on a bread and meat supper for beggars by trade. They are in constant employment, such as it is, and should learn to provide against the growing wisdom of the age, and the machinations of their natural enemies, the police and

the Mendicity Society. But, as before mentioned, the guests at Mr. Orsman's supper were only some of them beggars. Very many poor wretches, driven by hard necessity to seek temporary refuge at a tramps' lodging house, to whom a meal of half a pound of wholesome meat, with bread, was a feast indeed. And I dare say that there were several who were of a worse class, the cultivation of whose good-will was more a matter of prudence than charity with the far-seeing missionary. Until you feel strong enough to take an obstreperous bull by the horns, it may be judicious to give him a handful of fodder for his amusement, so that he may not dispute your peaceful path.

Next day I was present at a "spread" at the Mission Hall of a much more gratifying description. Next day was Wednesday, and for a very long time past, on this day, the good missionary among the savage tribes of St. Luke's has somehow contrived to raise from the charitable money enough to give the children—poor, neglected, literally, half-starved little fledglings of the surrounding rookeries—a hot dinner, a smoking-hot dinner, and as much as they can eat of it. The reader accustomed to plentiful and regular food can form no adequate idea of what a tremendous boon this is. The poor little creatures look forward to it as children who are better off look forward to Christmas day. From Monday till Wednesday evening the whispering of it grows and grows until it culminates in a "hooray" that comes from the lowest depths of their little empty bellies, when, morning school concluded, they are informed that they may run home and fetch their dinner things.

On the Wednesday in question the feed was to be Irish stew, and the number of guests expected was about three hundred. Nothing may be said about snowy table-cloths, shining platters, and spoons bright as new shillings. There were no table-cloths—no tables in fact. The funds of the institution will not admit of such luxuries. The worthy promoter of these dinners for destitute little children has not a shilling left after the meal is provided. During this hard weather every twopence he can beg goes into the pot, and comes out a substantial meal for a hungry child. Undoubtedly it would be nicer to see them all decorously

seated at a cleanly draped table, with plates, and spoons, and knives and forks, neatly placed before them, and one day this indefatigable caterer for the baby poverty-stricken hopes to achieve that splendid position; but at present his limited means compel him to give all his attention to keeping the Wednesday pot boiling.

And at stroke of one o'clock here they come trooping in, their young eyes twinkling in blissful expectancy as their young noses sniff the savoury stew seething in the cauldron below and just done——I have not yet seen the cauldron—— and as they come swarming in, their tiny ill-shod feet and their uncovered arms and legs blue with cold, faster and thicker yet, till the doorway bids fair to be blocked up, and there is still a mob behind, I have misgivings as to my friend's declaration that there will be enough for all and to spare; and what a awful thing it would be if, say, only a dozen of these poor, narrow-chested mites of things who passed last night in a delicious dream of Irish stew, who smacked their lips over the breakfast slice of dry bread flavoured with the promise of it, should be sent away empty! I do not believe they would survive the shock. They would faint and fall, still clutching the basin that was now a mockery and a snare; they would go mad and run amuck among their more fortunate stew-consuming brethren. Here they come each one bringing his or her "dinner things." I wish the reader could see the choice collection! Handless jugs, milk cans, baking dishes, sauce tureens, small sized tin saucepans, publicans' beer-cans, tin washing bowls—anything. They came of all ages, from the sturdy boy of ten to the tiny six-months-old baby in arms. There were scores of babies under two years old brought by their sisters and brothers. They came singly, and they came in families.

One family in particular was a sight to behold. A fortnight or so back a woman had died in one of the alleys, and under such suspicious circumstances that it was at first supposed that she had been murdered. A coroner's jury thought otherwise; so she was buried, and the matter dropped. But she left six little children behind her—a boy, the eldest, of twelve, and a girl, a patient, shrewd, poor little thing of nine, who now had to be mother to the

remaining four. She had brought them out to dinner, and carried the motherless baby, four months old, in her mites of arms; and there being no room on the forms, and finding, perhaps, that so sitting she could best feed baby and the next-sized youngster, who was little better than a baby, she squatted on the ground with the little brood round her, distributing Irish stew as grave and solicitous as a matron of thirty.

The elder children sat up in the galleries, with their vessels on their knees, and their shoulders bowed, and their countenances beautifully bedewed under the combined influence of savoury steam and energetic "blowing" to reduce the thick soup sufficiently below scalding point, to admit of its being swallowed. Waiters there were none, except the schoolmaster. With his cuffs turned back and his coat buttoned, he faced his herculean task like a man —like a kindly Christian man with a heart that yearned towards little children, and collected "empties" and brought them back replenished, with an amount of alacrity and good humour that visibly touched the elder boys' hearts as their stomachs filled and their appetites slackened.

The "youngsters," the ragged little flock of toddlers in small frocks and pinafores, ate by themselves in a place set apart. It was not a pretty sight; it was, indeed, a painful and distressing sight, if you made merely a sight of it. The forms round the sides of the room were filled, and the floor was literally covered with a swarm of children greedy for food as little pigs, and, now that they had the rare chance, partaking of it pretty much as little pigs would—literally so in some cases; and if one has a pie-dish full of stew and soup and no spoon, what is there but to use the fingers or lap at it? But at least there was this consolation—when swallowed it had precisely as beneficial an effect as that of Irish stew eaten off china with a spoon of silver. It satisfied the famished three hundred heartily, completely as was clearly manifested by the mellow way in which they sang their simple grace after meat, the good missionary accompanying them on his harmonium.

The institution in question does wonders with the small amount of money placed at its disposal, and many of its

dealings, besides those already described, are as quaint as they are useful. One of its most popular features among the fraternity from which the mission derives its name is a "barrow club."

It is impossible for a costermonger to do without a barrow; and not a man in twenty possesses one of his own. There are regular "barrow farmers," who charge a shilling a week for the loan of the humble vehicle—more if it is not a "constant hiring;" and in the latter case the hirer is supposed to do his own patching and painting, calling on the owner only when new wheels are required. There are men who have had the same barrow five, six, and seven years; and, as a new barrow does not cost more than fifty shillings, it will be at once seen that barrow-farming on a large scale is by no means a profitless speculation.

The monopoly, however, suffered a severe check when the "club" in question was started by Mr. Orsman and his friends. The barrowless costermonger pays in a shilling a-week, and, to encourage him, a bonus on his savings of four shillings in the pound is paid him. Or, if he shows himself an honest man, and cannot spare the shilling in addition to the one he is already paying for hire, a friend may "stand security" for him, and in a few months the saved hiring-shillings make the barrow his own. It is a highly respectable club, and no costermonger need be ashamed to belong to it, In fact, it is a "swell" club. Lord Shaftesbury is a member, and, having paid his shilling, he has his barrow. His lordship speaks of it as "my barrow;" but I am not sure that it is blazoned with the proper heraldic device for so distinguishing it. This I do know, however, that it is kept in the shed with plebeian barrows, to meet cases of emergency; and that it is very common for a poor fellow in difficulties to make humble application for the loan of the "Earl," by means of which he vends his fresh herrings, or whatever else he may have to sell.

A soup kitchen is to be found on the premises of the costermongers' mission, with a sick and burial club, and a clothing fund. Likewise there is a maternity fund, which yields a little help in the way of baby clothes and nutritious food to poor women in their greatest need. There are also a

"penny bank," a sewing class, and a free lending library, to say nothing of the daily ragged school—as ragged a school as ever was seen, the Sunday school, the evening reading and writing classes for young people of both sexes, and many other branches of instructive and religious entertainment.

But I think that the most original class of all is the "patching" class for boys. The use of that potent little weapon of civilization, the needle, is not particularly well known to many of the mothers of the neighbourhood; there are many boys whose mothers are dead, or so habitually dead-drunk that their conveyance to the cemetery would be little loss from a domestic point of view. So, some time ago, it was proposed to the youngsters that if they had a mind to patch up their rags a bit, patch-pieces would be found, and a good-natured matron would show them the way to stitch. The proposition was agreed to with alacrity, and is still in high favour. The "class," through the limited accommodation, is restricted to thirty; and as in no case are the boys found to be in possession of a spare garment of the sort that so sorely needs repair, it is a strictly private class, to which nobody is admitted except on business. Any boy guilty of "larking," or in any way disturbing the sober propriety so essential to the existence of the class, is instantly banished; and to the credit of the poor, little, ragged tailors, it is said that such expulsions are rare.

It is, perhaps, only natural that the care and perplexity attending the stitching together of rags that will scarcely bear the weight of a needle should at all times incline the operators to meditate on the advantage of being altogether independent of artificial covering.

"Wouldn't it be fine to do without altogether, Jack!" Mr. Orsman heard an enthusiastic youth of eight remarking to his friend. "Couldn't you get lots of browns from the coves on the homblibustes! They allers pitches at yer where yer trowsis is tore. They'd pitch more if you give 'em more to pitch at, I'll be bound."

"Ah!" rejoined the other, "so they might; but where'd you put the browns wot they pitched yer, if yer didn't have no pockets on?" An argument that effectually silenced the philosopher, and reconciled him to his job of adapting the

sleeves of his father's old jacket as legs to the still trustworthy "upper part" of his corduroys.

It has been said that such was the confidence reposed in the missionary, even by the very worst of the inhabitants, that even the "tramps' kitchens" were open to him. This statement, however, should be qualified. There are lodging dens in this lane of horrors which no decent man may enter. In one such place, on some desperately urgent occasion, the attempt was made, and swiftly followed by the expulsion of the rash peacemaker, roughly handled, and with his hat smashed. Two policemen were outside the door, and witnessed the ejection; and one of them remarked, "Hallo! you like it better than we do; you wouldn't catch *us* there for a trifle!"

Terrible stories are still whispered about the worst of these Golden Lane lodging-houses, of which there are seven that, in the aggregate, "make up" about five hundred beds every night. I am informed on good authority that occasionally the scenes to be witnessed in at least one of these houses—I should be happy to tell the police authorities which one—are appalling. This is after the police have made their last inspection for the night, in accordance with the terms of the Lodging-house Act. The most favourite entertainment at this place is known as "buff ball," in which both sexes—innocent of clothing—madly join, stimulated with raw whisky and the music of a fiddle and a tin whistle. The proprietor of one of these tramps' lodging-houses is a blind man—a terrible fellow, fierce, and old and Irish. He was the principal figure in a pretty picture that might have been seen in Golden Lane some time ago. His old domicile had grown so ruinous, that it was found necessary to turn him out, and pull it down. But "Blind Con" had an affection for the venerable pile, and was loth to budge. Drunk and furious, he seized the leg of a bedstead, and standing on his imperilled threshold, swung the formidable weapon round his sightless head, shrieking forth his determination to dash out the brains of any blank, blank, double blank policemen who dared approach him.

Improved as these places are said to be of late, the best of them are still far from perfect. Accompanied by my friend,

at ten o'clock at night I visited one of the most creditably conducted. It was as easy of access as a common public-house. The street-door was wide open, and at the end of the long passage we found the "kitchen," a room between thirty and forty feet long and, say, fifteen wide, provided with a few forms and tables, and with a vast fire-place, round which were clustered a crowd of supper-cookers, each one superintending his own fork or skewer, and "doing" to his liking his rasher or "bloater." About thirty persons were present—a few girls and women, but the majority of the male sex; and there was not *very* much objectionable behaviour visible. Of course the place was evil smelling, and the floor was not *quite* so white as driven snow; but it was easy enough to see how, under lax supervision, it might in a week become ten times worse. The common lodging-house is not like the casual ward, although, perhaps, the class of lodgers is pretty much the same. At the former place, before an applicant for a bed is admitted to the sleeping ward, he must undergo the ordeal of the bath; moreover, his clothes are taken from him, and kept in a closet till the morning; but at the Golden Lane establishments a lodger is privileged to go to bed as dirty as he likes, and as a rule he avails himself to the full of the considerate arrangement. In this one lodging-house ninety occupants of beds were nightly provided for.

I went upstairs, and into the many floors of the great rambling old house—at one time a mansion of considerable pretensions, judging from the width and rich carving of the oaken stairs—and peeped into the various dormitories. Paid inspectors visit these places now, and it is to be presumed that they properly attend to their duties, and that everything is as it should be. I very much question, however, if Mr. Inspector would care to pass a night there himself. To be sure, we were unfortunate in happening on a night when clean sheets were over-due, in consequence of the landlady's indisposition; but there were other matters to which a scrupulous person might object—an accumulation of black grease covering the head-board of his bedstead, for instance, and the existence of eight bedsteads in an ordinary-sized room.

The different floors are apportioned to single men, single women, and married "couples;" and I certainly cannot approve of the "partitioning" system which, as I am informed, is universally practised in these places as regards the sleeping accommodation of the "married." Economy of space is the first and foremost consideration with the Golden Lane lodging-house keeper: at the same time, he should not too flagrantly defy the law which declares that every married couple must be accommodated with a chamber in which to sleep by themselves. He does not actually defy this decent enactment, but he holds on by the feather edge of it. He slices up a big room into six, say—each compartment being just large enough to contain the narrowest of truckle bedsteads, and may be eighteen inches to spare for standing room.

But the partitions, which are mere matchboard, do not extend from the floor to the ceiling. They are no higher than those which divide box from box in an ordinary coffee-room, and at the bottom there is a space through which an adult could pass with perfect ease. It is a farce to call them separate chambers. Eight-pence is the price of one of these double beds, and "children must be paid for." "But supposing the child is a mere baby?" "Well, it counts as one," replied the obliging young person who "showed us over"—a regulation that must come very hard at times on an outcast young couple, with their only ragged fledgling.

But the licensed lodging-houses of Golden Lane, with all their ingrained, home-bred nastiness and unwholesomeness, and the undoubted facilities which they afford the predatory tribes of London for continuance in their nefarious ways, are by no means the most abominable sleeping-places to be found in this delectable neighbourhood. Here may also be obtained for the seeking a kind of accommodation that, so far as my experience goes, is unknown even by name in any other of Squalor's head-quarters.

The houses which affect the peculiar branch of the lodging business in question are known as "hot-water houses;" and, though they drive a roaring trade, it is unlicensed and illegal, and might be put down at a single day's notice, or at no notice at all, did the police authorities

think it worth while to move in the matter. They are, as a rule, small houses some containing only three rooms; and for the benefit of our sanitary guardians who may plead ignorance of the existence of these horrid places, it may be mentioned that they are to be found in Little Cheapside, Cow-Heel Alley, Reform Place, and Hot-Water Court—the last being a double row of little houses that possibly claims the honour of having originated the cheap and terribly nasty system which I am now about to explain.

They have no sort of special convenience, excepting perhaps that the cooking utensils are somewhat more capacious and numerous than are commonly found in a human habitation, which boasts of, say, a kitchen and four rooms ten feet by twelve. They are not provided with beds or bedsteads. It would be regarded as a shameful waste of precious space to introduce such luxuries. It would be impossible to plant more than two bedsteads in a chamber of the dimensions just described, and equally possible, even by the most ingenious packing, to squeeze more than six lodgers in each bed. Now this would not pay at a penny each—the sum charged. About twenty in a room is the expected number, and they lie in their own rags on the ground. I say "about twenty" because that happened to be exactly the number discovered under shockingly painful circumstances by a gentleman whose testimony is indisputable. He was called to a "hot-water" house to comfort a little girl dying, and nearly dead, of scarlet fever. He found the sick child lying in a corner of a parlour; and, the hour being after bed-time, the "hot-water" lodgers had made themselves comfortable for the night. "The floor was so thickly strewn with adults," says the gentleman to whom I have referred, "that it was next to impossible to approach the fever-stricken little girl without treading on them. I counted them, and there were *nineteen*." The child died in the night, and the nineteen jolly beggars set out next morning, with their rags loaded with scarlet fever, to spread it through the town.

The majority of these "hot-water" lodgers are cadgers and beggars by profession. It is not invariably because they cannot afford it, that they do not patronise the fourpenny

houses, but rather because they would sooner "pig" together on the boards than lie on separate beds; and threepence saved is threepence earned. To be sure, they might save the entire fourpence, and obtain, besides, something to eat that night and next morning. The doors of the casual wards will open to their knocking; but in this tribe only your loafing scoundrel, who is too lazy even to beg, avails himself of the parochial asylum. The professional beggar finds that it does not "pay." He has his daily occupation, and, if he would make good money, he must follow it industriously. A rich idea, indeed, to be sweating for three hours over a couple of bushels of stones, in payment for a bed and half a pound of bread, when as much time spent in judicious whining and cadging will earn him a shilling or eighteenpence! The "hotwater" lodger is expected to be something more than a person who merely pays his penny, selects his pitch on the parlour floor, and next morning takes his departure, perhaps to apply for a bare lodging at the end of the day. He is supposed to "use the house" in the daytime, and it is the last-mentioned custom that gives these lodging-houses their name. A big pot of water is kept constantly heated on the hob of the kitchen fire, and payment of a half-penny secures the privilege of the loan of a jug and boiling water to make tea or coffee. Lodgers are at liberty to bring in their cooked meat to eat; but, if they require the loan of the frying-pan, an additional half-penny is charged. Except for professional "mud-plungers"—beggars whose harvest-time is when they can wade in the middle of the road and in the pouring rain, with an agonising display of saturated rags and mire-soddened naked feet—wet weather is unfavourable. It is bad for street begging, because the few people about are "buttoned up," or their charitable hands are hampered with the care of an umbrella; it is bad for house-to-house beggars, because lady house-keepers wax wroth at the sight of miry footprints desecrating the purity of their hearthstoned steps; so it comes about that a rainy day means a crowded "hot-water" house from morning till night. For this day-light accommodation a penny a-head is charged, the use of the frying-pan being liberally thrown in.

Once more, as regards the Golden Lane missionary. What

it is to labour day by day and week by week, in wintry frost and snow, and summer's pestilent heat, among these dreadful places, must be left to the reader's imagination. It is easy enough, however, to comprehend this much. It is not every man has courage and confidence and patience enough to take on himself, without fee or reward, the tremendous task not only of amending the morals of this great horde of twenty thousand, steeped to their necks in vice and misery—but likewise of feeding swarms of neglected and hungry little children, and providing to the best of his means shoes for their naked feet and shirts for their naked backs, inculcating in them honest and cleanly habits.

AT A BLACK HOUSE.

My unsatiable desire to meet with strange company led me on a certain Sunday afternoon, in the autumn time, to pay a visit to what had been described to me, by a friendly undertaker, as one of the most flourishing public-houses of the "black sort," to be found at the outskirts of London, and arrived there at about three in the afternoon, after an hour's walk eastward, and I must confess that my first glance at the much vaunted hostel caused me a pang of disappointment. Except for the horse-trough and one drunken man asleep on an outside form, it looked as quiet and unbusiness-like a place as could well be imagined. It was almost of though a roadside villa, driven to desperation on account as its isolation from the abodes of men, had procured a spirit and beer license, and set up a sign-board, purely for the sake of enticing an occasional wayfarer to cross its threshold, and so for a while, by his discourse of the busy world, to dispel the gloom and dejection that seems to enwrap the place.

To be sure it was Sunday and church time; and under such conditions the "Polecat" could hardly be expected to appear at its liveliest. The good dry skittle ground was, of course, idle; and the attractions of the small tea-gardens were not increased by a lowering sky and a keen easterly wind.

But what about the "excellent and increasing blackcoach trade."

As a shrewd and suspicious man, I should have been inclined by the evidence of my visual organs, to regard that alluring line in the advertisement as something very like "fudge." There were black coaches in plenty, and as they slowly approached their number increased; but not one of them availed itself of the inducements to halt held out by the "Polecat." The drivers on the hearse and on the coaches, and the bearers or porters, or whatever they are

called, who clung in bunches at the back of the coaches, turned a look of placid serenity towards the "Polecat" portals, through the chinks of which, arranged artistically on the counter, a pyramid of cool and shiny pewter pots was temptingly visible: but vehicle after vehicle passed on as though the prospect of closer acquaintance were too remote to excite in the bosoms of their attendants the least present emotion.

But what puzzled me more was the undismay and perfectly calm manner in which mine host of the "Polecat" regarded this—as it appeared to me—neglect of his establishment. He stood on his steps with his fat thumbs hooked into his apron-strings, and blandly nodded in acknowledgment of the waving of every departing coachman's whip, as though he was stationed there expressly to warn them off, and were sensible of the obligation they conferred on him by not compelling him to resort to extreme measures. Presently, however, he shaded his eyes with his hand, took a long look down the road, and, finding no more coaches coming, became an altered man—a man whose spell of rest had expired, and who is thoroughly prepared for a rush of business that he knows to be presently coming.

"Bill," he cries, "is the spittoons, and the pipes, and that, all ready in the parlour?"

"All right, sir," responds brisk potman Bill.

"Then give the tables out in the back a brush down. There seems to be a tidy swarm of 'em to-day, with young 'uns and women, and we shall be glad to put 'em out there if the sun comes out anything strong."

And almost before Bill had hastily completed the last job entrusted to him, the first instalment of the "swarm of 'em" predicted by the sagacious landlord drew up at his door.

Not a very promising instalment, judging from appearances—a cheap turn-out of the hearse-and-coach-and-combined order, drawn by a single horse. Descending from their perch, the driver and his man threw open the black coach door that was now exactly opposite and not three yards from the public-house entrance, and without the least hesitation let down the steps. The occupants of the coach were two elderly people—a man and woman of the working class—

and a young girl of about sixteen. I think that the sudden halt and the opened door must have taken them by surprise for the old lady had her arms about the young girl's neck, and the old fellow's face was wet. His amazement at finding himself so close to the gin shop was such, that he forgot to wipe his eyes ere he addressed the undertaker's man—

"Go on, get home; we don't want to stay *here*."

"Must bait the horse, sir. Must put up a little while, sir. 'Spectable, quiet room, sir; no obtrushions. Always do it, sir. Be quick, sir; there's another party a waitin' to draw up."

Which was perfectly true; and what with his poor old head being so bemuddled with grief, and the undertaker's positive manner, and his disinclination to further afflict his old wife and his young daughter by a display of anger, he got out as he was told, with his companions; while an ostler drew the coach over against the wall, manœuvring it alongside as a man who knows how to make the most of precious space.

Another black coach drew up, and precisely the same argument that would accept of no denial—"Must bait the horses, sir; quiet, respectable place, sir; always stop here, sir, for just a few minutes;" and a second company of mourners, with their funeral cloaks and scarves, are ushered through the public-house doors. Then two coaches—but these contain mourners of that peculiar type who possibly have been to bury a distant relative, who stand in need of just that kind of consolation that the "Polecat" offers, and who will presently cool their warm brandy and water with sighs, and wipe their lips with the spotless handkerchief they have been holding to their eyes.

The black coaches are beginning to arrive rapidly; for the buryings in the neighbouring cemetery are all over, and the hard-worked minister, who for an hour and a half, as fast as his legs could carry him, has been hurrying from one black gap in the clay to another, has divested himself of his gown, and gone home.

Now, indeed, it was easy to believe that it was no vain boast when the landlord of the "Polecat" described his black-coach business as "excellent." Without the least

exaggeration, in less than half-an-hour from the arrival of the first melancholy vehicle to stand between the horse-trough and the tavern-doors, the number must have increased to a dozen at least; and, as with the first, so soon as each load of mourners was cajoled into the public-house, the ostlers took it in hand and stowed it snug, exactly as one sees the operation performed with pleasure vans, flashy "drags," and hansom-cabs at Epsom wayside-houses on a Derby-day. I do not say that every mourning-coach returning from the cemetery halted or attempted to halt at the "Polecat."

Many drove straight homeward, thereby suggesting the idea that the plea of baiting and resting the horses is not absolutely imperative. As regards size and condition, how many omnibus-horses may be favourably compared with the costly creatures whose sable hue peculiarly fits them for funeral work? The ordinary day's work of a pair of London omnibus-horses is to drag a vehicle constructed to carry twenty-eight persons over from ten to fourteen miles of slippery stones, and that task they perform day after day, summer and winter. How much hardship, then, can there be for a pair of the funeral performers' powerful black beasts, who bowl over six or seven miles of an easy country road with half-a-dozen coach-riders, and then, after the inevitable rest at the cemetery, return home to their stable?

Having concluded my survey of the "draw-up" in front of the "Polecat"—which was now packed quite full of coaches and hearses and as lively as a fair—I thought that I would have a peep in at the quiet and respectable room I had heard spoken of so frequently.

On the way I had to pass the capacious bar of the "Polecat," which now presented quite a cheerful and animated spectacle. It was crowded thick with undertakers' men, and on the metal counter was such an array of gin measures and glasses, ale quarts and glasses, papers of tobacco and pipes, as fully to account for the prevailing hilarity. Not uproarious hilarity, but that of a sort that was far more characteristic of the individuals engaged in it. The feasters did not laugh outright, and pledge each other over their liquor as men are wont to do; they covertly chuckled and

winked, and nudged each other as though they said, "Keep at it, keep at it, for there is no telling how long it may last, and lost moments, like spilt gin, can never be recovered. Hang all fastidious considerations about which is your glass and which is mine. It is all out of the same tub. Gulp it down. Don't stop to mouth it and discuss its flavour; swallow it, and taste the luxury of a good deep draught that shan't cost you a half-penny." And so, with subdued glee, there they stood on that Sabbath afternoon, to take their doses of gin, or rum, or ale, as fast as the obliging persons behind the bar were able to draw the prescribed restoratives; never stopping to taste it, but bolting it as practised patients bolt their familiar allotment.

Some had already imbibed until they could imbibe no more, and too blissfully indolent to exert themselves in the least, still with their trade-mark of sadness elongating their cadaverous countenances, they rolled on the forms and barrels, with their hats tipped piquantly over their eyes, and a short pipe at full blast adorning their mouths. There was one among them, a young fellow, who, judging from the ready manner in which his face bloomed under the influence of rum and water, must have seen some "life" as well as death, and who wore on his hat the customary emblem which denotes that it is a child who is carried to the grave. As he drank, laughing at some rich joke a friend was relating to him, his liquor somehow went the "wrong way," and he shook so in coughing that the little white cockade tumbled off his hat and fell into his streaming rum and water, and, dear heart! what fun there was among the undertakers' men when the young fellow, with a manner that would make his fortune as a comic singer at a music-hall, fished out the token of angel innocence, and held it aloft on the bowl of a spoon!

I passed on to the "commodious parlour" just as the door was pushed open by the active Bill, who was emerging with a tray full of empty pots and glasses. It was by no means a pretty sight that was revealed. The retiring-room—to take refuge in which, according to that gin-swelling undertaker's man, was to be secure from "obtrushion"—was, in its aspect as well as its atmosphere, the commonest of

common tap-rooms. There were narrow tables and seats at the sides, and here were seated the more decent of the company, attired in their funeral trappings, awaiting the pleasure of their custodians, who, as we may have seen, were so pleasantly engaged at the bar. But many, as the glasses before them proved, women as well as men, had been tempted to "partake of a little refreshment."

It was at the large table in the middle of the room, however, that Bill, the waiter, found most business. They were working people all of them, and some of them so poor that their suits could scarcely be called mourning in the strict sense of the term. The two or three master undertakers who condescended to sit with them in their glossy black and their spotless shirt-fronts and bands, with a goodly display of gold watch-chain adorning their waistcoats, made them look all the more shabby, poor fellows! They were not in the least proud, these sleek and comfortable gentlemen; yet, while they were pleasant spoken and affable, they did not care to disguise the social superiority shown in smoking none but the best cigars, and by drinking nothing but pale brandy in cold water. The poor mourners, who doubtless found it hard to scrape up the money with which to bury father or brother Bob, could not afford brandy and water and cigars; so they—used, as a rule, in their hours of tavern relaxation to short pipes and pints of beer—compromised the matter by smoking long pipes and drinking gin and water or the best ale. There were the liquor vessels and the spilled liquor on the table, and the pile of mourning hats, with the weepers attached, forming a pyramid in the centre; there, too, were the mourners, seduced by the undertakers' respectable example and by the repeated assurance that it was absolutely necessary to let the horses be baited; and the submissive folks were ordering just one drop more, until the room was foul with tobacco smoke and the fume of spirits, and the men were growing mooney-eyed and the women maudlin.

By which signs the watchful funeral performers knew the horses must have finished their bait, and rang the bell, on behalf of the person present responsible for the funeral expenses—to enquire what their men at the bar had had to drink, and in fact what it came to altogether? It was no

business of mine what the sum total was; but that the imbibers at the bar had their fair share in it was guaranteed by the fact, that several of them were so audaciously fortified as to start for the homeward journey, on the hearses as well as the black coaches, still smoking their short pipes.

A COW-CROSS TEA PARTY.

It had been, agreed by the benevolent promoters of the gathering that the invitation should be by tickets judiciously administered, and that the scene of the feast should be the Mission Hall in White Horse Yard, Smithfield.

The invited guests numbered over two hundred. To the uninitiated it may appear strange that a mere "tea" should possess attractions sufficient to call together so considerable a contingent of the rough-and-ready brotherhood of costermongers. As a rule, public teagivings are by no means heavy affairs. The cups are filled and emptied as a mere social formality, and there is scarcely any consumption of solids worth mentioning.

This, however, is in polite society, of whose usages the British costermonger is as ignorant as he could wish to be. With him a "tea" is a chief meal. His breakfast is a hasty affair, despatched in these winter morning hours before daylight, at a coffee-stall at Billingsgate or Farringdon Market. When he has bought his goods and drawn them home—at nine or ten o'clock, maybe—he will refresh on "a crust and a half-pint," but after that the course of business knows no break until dusk, when, "between the lights," he snatches half-an-hour or so, and feeds as heavily as his means will allow, ere, with recruited strength, he sallies forth again to dispose, by naptha-light, of the remains of his yet unsold stock. It is seldom, however, that an opportunity occurs for his indulging in what, in his rude though expressive language, he calls a "reg'ler buster." The regular burster is a luxury reserved for special occasions, such as that here described; and it was necessary to make preparations accordingly.

Attached to the snug little hall in White Horse Alley, there is an ante-room; and here it was that, hours before the appointed tea-time, those who had undertaken the formidable task of cutting bread and butter were hard at it.

There was a stack of loaves reminding one of those stacks of granite cubes one sees piled for road paving, and a mighty mound of butter. Besides which, there were in tall baskets of half-bushel capacity some hundreds of "chunks" of seed and currant cake. It appears that it is just possible to make a rough calculation as to the quantity of solid food that will be required on such occasions.

It has been ascertained, by careful observation, that when the costermonger grows aged, and is incapacitated by failing teeth, or some other physical infirmity, he can seldom, within the limits of an ordinary tea-time, manage to stow away more than six, or at the outside eight, slices. The middle-aged and robust make easy work of a dozen; the main difficulty rests with the long-legged, lean-flanked, growing young coster, whose appetite is continually keen as a razor edge. It is impossible to arrange with any certainty and prepare against this individual's raid on the bread-and-butter plate. There is nothing for it but to make a time bargain with him. It has been observed that, when at comfortable full swing, when he is not overcrowded, and it is not necessary for him to waste precious moments in blowing his hot tea, he is fairly equal to the task of disposing of a substantial slice in two minutes. He can keep on at this pace without faltering for a considerable period—how long, he himself confessedly does not know, since he never yet enjoyed the felicity of assisting at a tea-party that was sufficiently protracted to enable him to settle the question.

However, half-an-hour is reckoned to be a fair tea-time, which would give the growing young costermonger fifteen slices. Taking the average, it may be set down at ten for each of the two hundred, or two thousand slices in all—thick slices, bear in mind: anything under an inch thick would be regarded with contempt by the bony young barrowman, and perhaps with an uncomfortable suspicion that you have designs to inveigle him into the detestable ways of gentility. He calls it "toffishness." He is peculiar in his views in this respect. Tall hats are toffish in Costerdom: so are starched shirt-collars; and as for gloves, sooner than wear a pair a costermonger would be seen

carrying an umbrella. To affect thin bread and butter is undoubtedly "toffish," and is eschewed accordingly.

The evening was miserably wet, and I began, as six o'clock drew near, to be apprehensive lest on that account there should be a falling-off in the number of expected guests. But I did them injustice. There is not wanting among these honest poor fellows a spirit of gratitude towards those who compassionate their grievances, and they take a pride in "keeping their word." Ill clad, most of them, with not a few who imprinted on the boards fantastic muddy shapes, that were like anything but such as a sound shoe makes, they came trooping in at the appointed time, as bright and jolly-looking as possible—healthy-looking, too, which was even more surprising. A little while before, there had been made from the tall roof of the Mission House a display of lime-light, which threw its dazzling, unearthly glare through the darkness on the surrounding courts and alleys with an effect that was appalling. Between the Sessions House and the New Meat Market may be reckoned a score or so of such hideous "no thoroughfares" as are to be met with in no other part of London. Maybe there are many who, passing along Turnmill Street, towards the Metropolitan Railway Station, have ventured to peep into the two-feet-wide entrances to nests of squalor; but such a glimpse gives them no more idea of a Cow-Cross Alley's hidden mysteries than is to be gleamed of the wonders of the ocean by the contemplation of a bag of Mr. Tidman's sea-salt.

The sun, even, knows very little about the matter, for its rays can penetrate only to a little distance between these black crevices, flanked on either side by tall, time-wrecked, crazy houses, each with its ten, twelve, or fourteen rooms—for the cellars count as such—and each of these again in its turn an abode for a family. It was startling to see the fashion in which the inexorable lime-light ripped away the dense alley mist that clung like a sable cloak about these horrible habitations, and exposed them. You could see through the uncurtained windows sheer into scores of rooms, plainly as you can into a dingy corner when a bull's-eye light is flashed upon the spot; the walls bare and smoke-begrimed, the floor naked, except for the sack or strip of old

carpet before the fenderless fire-place, round about which the squalid family huddled. You could see, as plainly as though you were within three yards of them, what were the rags they wore, and how insufficent they were to cover the poor little bodies of the children. You could make out, too quite distinctly, what a dreadful contrivance a Cow-Cross Alley bedstead is in many cases, and picture to your mind what a terrible hardship you would find it to have to lie on such a heap of rags and under such a coverlet. How cold it must be—taking into account the broken ceiling and the broken windows—in the winter nights; how insufferably suffocating and sickening in the sultry nights of July and August!

It was difficult, when the laughing, merry-faced folk trooped into the hall to tea, to realise that they were of the kind who can find no better lodgings, and can afford no better bed, than those I have described. There were coster girls as well as lads—stout-built, buxom wenches, with rosy cheeks and bright eyes; and coster matrons, with their well-nurtured babies; and prime-o'-life costers, tall enough for lifeguards-men, with limbs in proportion.

A noticeable feature was that the greater part had washed and dressed for the occasion; and it was plain that there had been a considerable expenditure in hair-oil. An uproarious head of hair, even among the lads, was decidedly the exception; while in many instances it was evident that vast patience and perseverance had been employed in persuading the rebellious stubble to "lie down" peaceably, and even permit its untutored ends to be tortured in what was supposed to be a curl, although, as regards both rigidity and curve, it was more like a butcher's meat-hook. But they were one and all remarkably obliging and docile, and in a hundred small ways evinced a disposition to be comfortable and sociable.

They needed no second bidding by their true friend, the presiding genius to the Cow-Cross Mission, to make themselves quite at home. The women did so to the extent of removing their bonnets and tying on a clean apron, produced from the gown pocket; the men, at least very many of them, by divesting themselves of their coats and jackets, and

appearing in their shirt-sleeves. Some half-dozen extreme enthusiasts went the length of rolling their shirt-sleeves above their elbows, and disencumbering their sinewy throats of their kerchiefs. While the tea, already milked and sweetened, was being teemed from the copper into convenient portable urns, the company rose and sung a hymn, which lasted until the bread-and-butter bearers, being now quite ready, entered in single file. Then, with a subdued chuckle of delight, they sat down and commenced their attack.

That was a serious business—serious as it was solid. I was under the impression that the chuckle above-mentioned betokened that it was to be a mirthful meal—that so soon as the first slice or so had, as it were, taken the edge off the company's teeth, and their nostrils had sniffed the soothing aroma of the really excellent congou, pleasant conversation and mild hilarity would be the order of the evening. But I did not know them. That preliminary sound which I had mistaken for a chuckle, was but the brief ejaculation of proud confidence with which the combatant, sure of his strength and skill, welcomes the approach of an antagonist. So it was with my staunch two hundred. The severity—not to say ferocity—with which they helped themselves to slices, the contraction of brows that accompanied the act, the grim way in which, as they champed their massive jaws, they put aside the oily meat hook, stray hairs of which tickled their cheek-bones, as though to show how inexorably determined they were to renounce the vanities of the world, and give their minds steadily to its substantials—all this made a sight to behold.

There was no hurry, no scrambling—there was no need for either; almost every table of fifteen or eighteen guests had its particular waiter, and the plates were always kept piled with slices. Each double row kept its attendant going pretty briskly, however. He was not troubled much with verbal applications. When a guest had bolted, or was in the act of bolting his last mouthful, he either caught the waiter's eye and winked his desire, or, failing this, he snapped his finger and thumb, or emitted a short, sharp sound within his lips—"Phit!"—and the plate was forwarded immediately. The remarkable way in which the more hearty of the guests dis-

posed of these slices was so universal, that I need but describe the process as performed by one. Having gulped down the remnant of slice seven, he signalled for slice eight. If he had yet a moment to spare before his masticating organs were quite at liberty for the reception, he clutched it firmly by the crust, and regarded its buttered surface, as though to fascinate it and make it fall an easier victim to his devouring jaws. Then he gave his lips one cooling lick, and, opening his mouth to its widest, rammed in the slice as though about to take a full cast of his molars and incisors for dental purposes. When he released the slice, its crummy part had half-vanished, his sharp teeth having actually grazed the crusty back-bone. As he masticated the mouthful, he kept his eyes steadily on the wounded slice, and turned it a little to the right and to the left, as if to make up his mind at what part he would take a fresh grip of it. This settled to his satisfaction, he made a snap at the remainder of the crumb, and, having despatched that at two bites, he disposed of the crust, and promptly telegraphed for slice nine.

The tea they treated with less ceremony, though their relish for it was unmistakable. When they ordered a fresh cup, the first act was to pour it all out into the saucer, so it might cool. When they required it, they did not sip it, but "flushed" their throats with is at a single drench. These, however, be it remembered, were the younger branches, the unruly colts of Costerdom, who had not been taught manners from their elders.

But they all ate and drank with a most tremendous relish. It was easy to understand now what a "reg'ler buster" meant. It means the partaking of food until the fastenings of ordinary articles of attire are no longer equal to the strain on them, and must be relaxed on peril of splitting. But my young friends, the budding costermongers, accomplished this "letting out" with as much circumspection as they shewed in devouring slices. They did not let slip all the buttons of their waistcoat at once, but after a certain time paid toll, as it were, at the rate of a button for a slice.

And yet it was impossible to call it gluttony. There was not a single youth present who did not, after he had made away with his entire row of buttons, look as serene and comfortable

as though he was wearing an under-waistcoat closer buttoned even than the outer one, and as though he was good to keep on to the bottommost button-hole. Indeed, their undiminished capacity was presently proved. The cake appeared in the half-bushel baskets, and was hailed with a hearty welcome. There were large pieces of cake in the baskets—as large as the hand, perhaps; but not a guest present refused a slice and another cup of tea "to wrench it down," as one young gentleman apologetically remarked to his attendant. He and his companions, however, continued to put away several slices each without much "wrenching."

On the whole, it was a highly successful tea. This was sufficiently evidenced by the beaming faces of all present, as well as by the fact that, when it was suggested that it was "all over, but if any lady or gentleman there, as yet, had not had enough, they were at liberty to stay after the rest had dispersed, and have a jolly good gorge all to themselves." I could not but note that there were three or four who cast wistful glances at the cake as though of more than half a mind to accept the invitation, but though bold enough for most things, had not the courage to withstand the jeers of the contented majority, and joining heartily with the rest in the "three cheers" that were given for the entertainer, the comfortable company of low Cow-Crossites dispersed.

AT A BLIND BEGGARS' TEA PARTY.

JUST as it happened, within a fortnight of my taking tea at Cow-Cross I was favoured with another invitation of a similar nature, and emanating from an exactly similar neighbourhood, in fact from Mr. Orsman's Mission House in Golden-lane. It is possible to have too much of good things, even when they take the shape of bread and butter in a clothes-basket, and tea poured out from a two-gallon can. For the moment I was about to write a polite declining note, but closer inspection of the card resolved me to embrace the offered opportunity as one not likely to occur again.

Half-past five had been duly advertised as tea-time, and least an hour before, the various thoroughfares that led to the place of meeting must, to the uninitiated, have presented a curious and perplexing spectacle. Only for the absolute absence of consternation and panic, it might have been that a blight, that carried on its wings the terrible scourge of blindness, had fallen on at least one in twenty of the pedestrian population. Blind men, blind woman, blind boys, blind girls—the pavement was fairly dotted with them.

Grey-headed, bent-backed, poor old folks, whose organs of vision may have failed them through sheer decay of nature; tall and sturdy fellows, whose affliction, as it seems, was so recent that they had not as yet recovered from the first fright of it, and still carried dismay in their upturned faces, and stared timidly before them, as though it were not quite impossible that, in an instant, life might dart back to their hollow sepulchres of dead sight, and enable them to see and understand the strange din that surrounded them. Scarcely less painful was it to contemplate the faces of the blind children, as a rule happy and cheerful—thank goodness—but lacking light, or, at best, shining with a borrowed brightness, gathered from the merry talk of children about them who could see.

But where were the dogs?

Our four-footed friends are so intimately associated with blind men that one looked for them quite naturally; and failing to discover them, experienced an additional alarm for the safety of the sightless ones. Somehow, they did not appear nearly so secure in the keeping of their two-legged guides. It was as though a company of cripples had abandoned their crutches, substituting for the old familiar supports, on which they swung along so easily, the willing though awkward, hands and arms of their friends.

But, as I afterwards found out, dogs were not eligible for admittance at the place of the meeting; and, though at first this may appear a somewhat arbitrary arrangement, there really may be sound grounds for the canine exclusion. Blind men's dogs are, as a rule, exceedingly sensitive animals, and jealous for their master's safety, and it is not difficult to imagine how easily a "row" might originate, and what a sad interference with harmonious tea-drinking might be created by a hundred determined dogs of various breeds, and with their collars and chains hideously entangled, each bent on deadly satisfaction.

Again, the dogs of blind men are known to be peculiarly alive to the charms of music, and since the entertainment in question was to include singing and tunes on the harmonium, the committee probably exercised a wise discretion in avoiding the possibility of a discordant augmentation of the choruses. Some few of the invited guests, however, were without the "guides" of any kind. Old experienced London hands these, who had served a long apprenticeship, and were perfect masters of the mystery of finding their way in the blank lands of total blindness from any given quarter of the metropolis to another, with only a stick to steer by.

I had some talk with an elderly gentleman, so accomplished, who had found his way from Hoxton to Goswell Street, with scarcely a speck of mud on his well-blacked boots, and who, in confidence, informed me that nothing beat him but fog. "It bothers me somehow," said the old gentleman, "and gets into my ears and kind o'spins my head full of wool. I've been that deceived sometimes as to find

myself right under a cab-horse's head; when I could have declared that it was quite a good six yards off."

The same afflicted person was terribly wroth against metropolitan improvements generally; but waxed to a degree of eloquence that even the Board of Works would have found it difficult to resist, when he spoke of the cruel wrong he had endured through the machinations of the inventors of wood and asphalte road paving. "It isn't English at all; it's a sly, sneaking French way," the irate blind Briton declared; "there is nothing like good old cobble-stones that made their wheels rattle in an honest way that a man can hear." The precious ears of blind men guide their speech in a way that sounds odd at times. "Well, Matthew, and how do you find yourself at this happy time?" one of the blind visitors asked of the blind ticket-taker at the door. "Better, better; but not well, I am sorry to say." "Ah, I might ha' knowed that," returned the sympathetic old lady, with a doleful wag of her blank face; "you don't *sound* very bright."

Being a busy worker among them, the blind ticket-taker knew them all, and with no other assistance than an intelligent little boy, his son, could render him, received his motley guests, and, according to their age and the severity of other ailments, besides blindness, under which many of them were suffering, directed where they should be seated. This distinction was necessary, as it was but a little place, and would not accommodate their whole number without packing some of them in the gallery upstairs. They came from all parts of the town—from Stepney, from Mile-End, from Hoxton; but, with an instinct that was marvellous, he knew them all by mere touch, as it seemed. "How d'ye do, Peters? The stairs will be no trouble to you; you'll go up. Same with you, Mrs. Harrison—you won't mind, I know." "Not in the least, sir; but the old 'oman as was good enough to guide me is a club-footed old 'oman, and she——" "All right; downstairs, then. Ah, John Hays! who is with you, old John?" "My daughter, Peggy, sir." "Umph! well, you two had better keep down here; I know how uncertain her fits are." And so they came stumbling in, the lame not unfrequently leading the blind, until the stipulated number of

two hundred have obtained admission, and the party is complete.

Of the tea I need say nothing, except that it was a plentiful meal, and that the cake and bread and butter were in excess of the demand, which, however, was sufficiently hearty to be equal to the demolishing of several capacious wicker clothes-baskets piled full of tempting slices and "rounds."

I can't say that it was a particularly lively tea-party. Even among the old women there was little or no gossiping. Every one's neighbour was a stranger at present. Under more favourable circumstances, we know how cautiously guests unknown to each other unbend and engage in conversation, and it is not difficult to understand how this feeling of reserve is increased in the case of persons who in their sociable advances have literally to *feel* their way. Then, again, that very many of them were bewildered with the strangeness of their position was painfully apparent. Be his home never so poor a one, each has his special corner by the fire, his special chair to sit in, and the cup that he drinks out of is his only, and the handle of it is familiar to his sensitive fingers. That the majority of them were embarrassed in these small matters was perceptible at a glance. They sat stiff and awkwardly on the forms, and held on to the never-failing stick, standing it between their knees, and embracing the sturdy knob of it with their interlaced fingers, as though if *this* old friend failed them they should be lost indeed. The clumsy tea-cups were foreign to their touch, and it was evidently with a depressing consciousness of the risk he ran that each blind tea-drinker essayed the passage of a smoking saucerful from the table to his lips. But sufficient time being allowed them, and confidence growing with experience, I believe that one and all contrived to do tolerably well.

But the best of the entertainment had yet to commence. Plentiful teas were, to be sure, not everyday occurrences with these poor creatures shut out from the world. Still they did happen at times; whereas, what was in store for them had occurred but once before in all their sightless lives, and that was on that very evening a year ago. There was to

be a concert—not a solemn affair, built up entirely of hymns, but a musical entertainment that was to be in part funny. Nay, there was no use in blinking the fact now that it grew so near, there was to be downright comic singing.

They pricked up their ears in the space before the platform as soon as the sober harmonium, under the fingers of a blind player, gave notice that, contrary to its custom, it was about to be hilarious. With a keen remembrance of last year's treat, the sightless orbs that faced about in the front row of the gallery quivered and twitched, which was the best they could do towards twinkling. But they were not to remain up in the gallery—they were to come down and sit all together as they did last year; and this they did, laughing and chatting as they made room for each other, and thawing out of their mistrust and timidity in a wonderful way.

Now that their faces were turned upwards, and the gaslight shone down on them, you could see how awfully blind some of them were; and I verily believe that what was once their eyes would have looked less appalling had not their faces been puckered in smiles. It was so grimly suggestive of death in the midst of life. And there they were, many rows deep, and all with their eyes towards the harmonium, for all the world as though they could see. And I may here remark that several of the blind men and women wore spectacles, not, of course, that they derived the smallest personal benefit from their use, but purely out of tender regard for the sensitive feelings of the beholders.

A blind man played the harmonium, and a blind man who was now growing towards middle age, and who had lost his eyes when he was two months old, in a voice mellow and jovial, started the concert with "'Tis forty years, my old friend John," in a chorus to which all joined with heartiness, and as though it were an uncommon treat to hear their own voices mingling harmoniously with other voices. After that a blind female singer favoured the audience with "Beloved Star," singing the song with much sweetness. Then followed other songs, including one about the "Merry sunshine;" and it is a remarkable fact that the majority of the ditties sung bore reference to pleasant *sights* rather than sounds.

There were some funny songs, too, all about courtship and sweethearting (all sung by blind singers), and a "laughing song," the chorus to which was nothing but "Ha! ha! ha!" and it was really comforting to find, now that they were stirred to it, that they could laugh as heartily without eyes as with —a fact that previously I certainly should have been disposed to dispute. It was all right now as regards sociability, and I have no doubt that the laughing song did it. When it becomes a trial of good humour, even between blind men, who shall laugh the longest and the loudest, there seems nothing for the vanquished one to do but clap hands with the victor, and hail him as a pleasant neighbour. They were getting so well along one with the other under the influence of comic and sentimental song, that I was profane enough to wish that I might order in just enough of steaming punch to serve out to all who liked it—one, only one, comfortable tumbler, with new long clay pipes and Bristol bird's-eye (not by way of mending matters—they required no mending, as every one of the two hundred was ready to attest), when, shortly after nine o'clock, they took their departure, each one receiving a new shilling as he or she passed out.

TO SUPPER WITH A HUNDRED THIEVES.

SUPPER follows naturally on tea, and I may here relate my experiences of strange company, derived from my having on one occasion "fallen among thieves."

The invitation ticket was neither elaborate nor imposing. It merely set forth, on three inches by one and a half of modest pasteboard, that on Monday, the 30th of January, at six o'clock in the evening, "Ned Wright" would give a supper to boys who had been convicted of felony.

Honest boys were ineligible. A sort of committee of investigation was instituted some days before, and each case was inquired into, so as to make quite sure that the applicant for a ticket was a genuine black sheep, and not a lamb in wolf's clothing. How necessary it was to take this precaution was proved by more than one barefaced fraud that was attempted. Hale's Street, Deptford, was to be the scene of the banquet, and that neighbourhood abounds with squalor and poverty, which may account for the many ingenious devices resorted to by really honest lads to pass themselves for the sake of a meal of soup and bread, as convicted thieves. One lad had been at the pains to get himself "coached" in the most elaborate manner. He laid claim to have "served" both in Maidstone goal and the prison at Wandsworth, knew the names of the governors and of the chief warders, the peculiarities of the work, and the food, and all the rest of it. Even Mr. Edward Wright, despite his practical experience, was nearly taken in by the honest little villain, but on cross-examination a slip of the tongue betrayed him, and he slunk away shamefaced, and let us hope not with a stern determination to make his claims beyond dispute by the time the next felon's supper was announced.

Having been assured that the guests invited to the supper were to be *bona fide* thieves, I must confess that I went prepared to face some sort of danger. Just imagine, a hundred

of the professed "dangerous class," the young of the tribe, to be sure, but none the less to be dreaded on that account. Five score of budding burglars! A hundred robbers in training, and with not even that care for their own safety that might be naturally expected in ruffians of experience, in the midst of them, with a decent hat on one's head, a coat worth a pound on one's back, and possible shillings in one's pocket, and no police to protect you! Terrible, indeed, was the picture the excited imagination conjured up—marvellously flat, and poor, and commonplace was the reality

Let the reader imagine a barn-like building with whitened walls, and rows of forms—schoolboys' desks—with nothing as yet more promising in view in the way of supper than several pyramids of enormous white basins at the further end, and a heap of tin spoons piled on a table. A few ladies and gentlemen a dozen, maybe—are talking here and there, quite free and fearlessly, while by twos and threes some small boys make their appearance and take their seats in front.

They make their appearance to the number of thirty, perhaps, and there is nothing either striking or picturesque about them; they are merely poor half-starved little wretches of the gutter, ranging in age from nine to thirteen. They are not in the least abashed. They talk and laugh, and criticise the ladies and gentlemen, and make jocular remarks concerning the spoons and basins.

"When do you expect the thieves?" I venture to enquire.

"These are thieves," is the answer. "You see the little ones are bolder than the big ones, and come earlier so as to get front seats and the first of the soup."

It was so hard to believe that I got into conversation with the children, and sure enough my informant was right. There was not one of them that had not "done his bit," as they said, and more than one had tasted prison fare and picked prison oakum on three distinct occasions. They did not evince the least shame in making confession—they seemed proud of it, rather; and one young gentleman, aged eleven, who, with a haughty twist of his side locks, announced that he had been "in" five times, was at once

set down by a friend, who told him that he needn't make such a jaw about it, and to bear in mind that they wasn't all convictions, but two was "marnders" (remands), and that he was both times discharged at the second hearing. One little boy told me how that he had "done three months at Maidstone" for nailin' two glasses of sweetstuff out of a shop, and had treated his companions to a peep-show with the proceeds, and was vilely betrayed by one whom he had declined to treat, and was arrested with his eye at the peep-hole, and in the midst of his enjoyment of the thrilling spectacle of the murder of Mr. O'Connor by the Mannings.

After a little while other thieves arrived, and the room began to fill—older lads these last arrivals—some of them seventeen and eighteen, I dare say, but all of precisely the same type. Downcast, hungry-looking, woefully seedy-looking, poor fellows, lively only for a feeble attempt at devil-may-care, evidently got up for the occasion. All thieves, Mr. Wright himself assured me—lads who were in and out of prison constantly, and who yet were so "hard up" as to be glad to march in there, avowing their trade, and with their faces fully revealed in the gaslight, for the sake of securing a quart of soup! We are told that periodicals of the "Jack Sheppard" and "Boy Highwayman" school sell in hundreds of thousands weekly to the youth of the nation who unhesitatingly believe in the splendour and gallantry of the heroes therein described. What a memorable lesson for the money-wasting young stupid-heads, could they for half-an hour have contemplated that poor, ramshackle, starveling crew who sat so patiently waiting for the white basins to be filled!

As I gazed on the ragged rows, one behind the other—on the heads that as yet were fiercely bristling in tell-tale token of the recently-applied gaol scissors, on heads to which oil had been bountifully applied, in the desperate endeavour to make the growing crop "lie down," like that of honest people, and on still other heads—these the vast majority—that were thatched with a towzled mat of what was hair, but which looked like tangled wisps of dirty felt—as I contemplated the array of pinched and poverty-stricken and pale and haggard faces so eloquent of intimate ac-

quaintance with vice and misery in their worst forms—I could not but think how very much better off the entire company would be if one and all were arrested on the spot, and carried off to prison.

No wonder that the law's worst scourge for evil-doers has no terrors for such as these! I recollect some time since inspecting a great prison; it was evening time, and in the autumn. Along with others, the van had brought with that day's batch of convicted prisoners two lads of about thirteen and fifteen years old. Outside the cell door of each were the rags they wore at the time of their capture—their dirty, tattered jackets, their trousers of many patches, and their gaping, down-trodden old shoes—each lot in a sort of cabbage-net, all ready for depositing in the steam-purifying apparatus down below. Then the cell-doors were opened, and the legitimate owners of the woefully dilapidated suits were revealed, no longer dirty. Each one had had his sousing and scrubbing in a plentiful bath of warm water; their faces yet glowed, and their ears were crimson and clean. The hammocks on which they reposed were scrupulously white, the rugs that covered them warm and comfortable, and the walls and ceiling and floor of their dungeon spotless and wholesome. The lads had partaken of supper, and knew for a certainty that a warm breakfast would be got ready for them next morning. It did not in their case—which was doubtless the case of at least fifty of the young thieves now before me—seem a bit like punishment and prison. It was more like coming "home" after a season of disheartening struggling and striving. As one turned from them, cuddled comfortable and clean under their rugs, and once more glanced at the poor rags and the old boots bundled up in the cabbage-net, one could not help reflecting, "Poor wretches! it must be a desperately hard life while you are at liberty to pursue it; but, thank Heaven! you are here well provided for for a few months, at all events."

The thieves' supper itself was a decided success. When the three enormous tin holders, of the sort that milk is brought from the country in, made their appearance, one hungry roar made the roof ring, and there was no such things as pacifying the lads until their kindhearted, black-

coated friends on the platform turned back their cuffs and applied themselves to filling the quart basins. The understood terms were a "tuck out," which in Hale's Street is short and simple language for as much as can be eaten. Enough was provided—thirty-five gallons—with bread enough to allow a full pound to each guest. Little thieves and big thieves ate with a ravenous relish that was at once gratifying and painful to behold. Two quart basinfuls were a common allowance—and at least half-a-dozen exceptionally long and narrow lads were pointed out to me as having emptied four basins. One quite forgot that they were thieves—they looked so thankful.

The supper, of course, was but a preliminary to the discourse that afterwards followed. To say the least, the strange audience received it in perfect good-humour and seriousness; and when the question was put, Would they be willing to abandon their evil courses if they found the chance? up shot their assenting hands as though let loose by the pulling of a single string. And truly, when one saw what a poor miserable lot they were, it was not at all difficult to believe them sincere.

BELLE-ISLE.

On a piping hot summer's day—the thermometer marking 80 in the shade, I took it into my head that I would go and see how such weather agreed with a place so terrible as Belle-Isle was made out to be.

It is doubtful if, left to himself, the stranger would ever discover the place in question. Those who are disposed for a similar exploration, however, may accept the following simple direction. Turn up a road called the York Road, by the side of the King's Cross railway station, and follow your nose. Even should the wind be unfavourable, the air will certainly be laden with peculiar indications that may safely be trusted for guidance. Keep straight along the York Road, and gradually you will be sensible of leaving civilization behind you.

You will discover on the right-hand side of the way, opposite to some cottages which stand in a street that is "no thoroughfare," a modest pair of gates attached to a red-bricked lodge, bearing the inscription "Cemetery Entrance." Here it is that bodies intended for interment in out-of-town cemeteries are housed until the stated time arrives for their conveyance down the line.

It is a terribly deserted and melancholy place, looking as though every one connected with its proper and decent keeping had given up the ghost and slipped down the line with the rest. Between the gates and the dismal house where the coffins are stored, there is a space which desperate efforts have been made to convert into a kitchen garden; but never there was a more ghastly failure. Barren, sickly, yellow-cabbage stalks, that have out-grown their strength, cropped out of the ground all aslant; while fierce rank weeds have seized on more tender plants of the green tribe, and strangled them till they are absolutely black in the face.

The iron gate has long shed the coat of paint by which it was originally covered, and glows dusky red with rust.

It is evident that no one now resides at the lodge; for there is a board on which are inscribed directions to "apply over the way," and when last I passed a dozen or so of shoeless, almost breechesless young Belle-Islanders were swarming over the wall, and deriving immense satisfaction from the pastime of pitching old tin pots and other gutter refuse upon a sort of high-up window-ledge.

But you do not arrive at Belle-Isle proper until you reach the archway that spans the road. At this point you may dispense with the services of your faithful olfactory guide; indeed, it would be better, provided you do it in a way that shall not be remarkable—for the act is one that the inhabitants may resent—to mask its keen discrimination with your pocket handkerchief. Here, an appropriate sentinel at the threshold of this delectable place, stands the great horse-slaughtering establishment of the late celebrated Mr. John Atcheler.

As a horse-slaughtering establishment nothing can be said against it. I am afraid to say how many hundred lame, diseased, and worn-out animals weekly find surcease of sorrow within Atcheler's gates—or how many tons of nutriment for the feline species are daily boiled in the immense coppers and carried away every morning by a legion of industrious barrowmen. Everything, I have no doubt, is managed in the best possible way; but that best still leaves a terribly broad margin for odours that can only be described as nauseating. In the shadow of the slaughter-yard is a public house—a house of call for the poleaxe men and those who, with a hook to catch fast hold, and an enormous knife, to denude the worn-out horses' bones of the little flesh that remains attached to them.

They are terrible looking fellows, these honest horse slaughterers. They seem rather to cultivate than avoid stains of a crimson colour; and they may be seen at the bar of the public-house before-mentioned, merry as sand-boys, haw-hawing in the true and original "fee-fo-fum" tone, drinking pots of beer with red hands and with faces that look as though they had been swept with a sanguinary

hearth-broom. You can see all this from the gateway where the savage young Belle-Islanders congregate to give fierce prods with pointed sticks at the miserable bare-ribbed old horses as they come hobbling in. Altogether the picture is one to be remembered.

The horse slaughterer's place, however, is by no means the ugliest feature of Belle-Isle. Its inodorous breath is fragrant compared with the pestilent blast that greets the sense of smell before a distance of fifty spaces further has been accomplished. The spot that holds the horse slaughter houses is modestly called "The Vale;" the first turning beyond is, with goblin like humour, designated "Pleasant Grove." It is hardly too much to say, that almost every trade banished from the haunts of men, on account of the villanous smells and the dangerous atmosphere which it engenders is represented in Pleasant Grove. There are bone boilers, fat-melters, "chemical works," firework makers, lucifer-match factories, and several most extensive and flourishing dust-yards, where—at this delightful season so excellent for ripening corn—scores of women and young girls find employment in sifting the refuse of dust-bins, standing knee-high in what they sift. In the midst of all this is a long row of cottages, each tenanted by at least one family; and little children, by dozens and scores, find delight in the reeking kennels. These are the very little ones; those of somewhat larger growth turn their attention to matters less trivial.

For instance, a knot of half-a-dozen were calmly enjoying, at the wide-open gates of a sort of yard, the edifying and instructive spectacle of a giant, stripped to his waist, smashing up with a sledge-hammer the entire red skeletons of horses that had just been dragged from the cutting and stripping department. Again, the juvenile Belle-Islanders are not so benighted that they have not heard of the game of cricket; nor did a lack of the recognised appliances needed for that noble game frustrate their praiseworthy determination to do something like what other boys do. A green sward was, of course, out of the question; but they had, to the number of eight or ten, chosen a tolerably level bit between two dust-heaps. For wickets they had a pile of

old hats and broken crockery; for bat the stump leg of an old bedstead, and for ball *the head of a kitten.*

This is not romance, but earnest fact. With the thermometer at 80 in the shade, there was the merry young band of cricketers, their faces and the rest of their visible flesh the very colour of the dust they sported among; and, the sun blazing down on their uncovered heads, they were bowling up the kitten's head, giving it fair spanks with the bedstead-leg for ones and twos, and looking out with barbarous relish for "catches." Evidently they were boys employed in some of the surrounding factories, and this was the way in which they sought recreation in their dinner-hour! I say evidently they were factory-lads, because their fantastic aspect bespoke them such. There were boys whose rags were of a universal yellow tint, as though they were intimately acquainted with the manufacture of sulphur or some such material; boys whose rags were black as a sweep's; and other boys who were splashed with many colours, that made them twinkle in the sun like demon harlequins as they wrestled in the ashes for possession of the "ball."

Belle-Isle is by no means a small place. Beyond the delectable Pleasant Grove is another thoroughfare called Brandon Road. Brandon Road has cottages on either side of the way, and gives harbourage to several hundred cottages little and big. The road is hemmed in, as Pleasant Grove is, by stench-factories, and the effect on an individual used to ordinarily wholesome air is simply indescribable. The odour makes the nostrils tingle; you can taste it on the tongue as though you had sipped a weak solution of some nauseating acid; it makes the eyes water. And yet, as before stated, swarms of little children and grown men and women abide winter and summer in this awful place; here they cook and eat their food, and, these sultry nights, when even in open places scarcely a breath of air stirs, they retire to bed amid it all. It is utterly impossible that the poor wretches doomed to Pleasant Grove and Brandon Road should not be afflicted occasionally with illness; and just imagine the sick bed at this time of year!

But there is another feature of this pestilent colony of

too grave importance to be passed over. The row of barrows and "half-carts," as they are called, unmistakably denotes that Brandon Road is a place where costermongers congregate—vendors of fruit and vegetables who hawk their wares through the day, and bring home at night what remains unsold. And where is that remainder stored? It cannot be left in the streets all night; it must be carried into the house—into the ill-ventilated hovel containing three rooms and a wash-house; every apartment affording sleeping accommodation for some member of the householder's family or his "lodgers." One shudders even to think of it. The temperature of 80 in the shade, and the plums and apples and pears—more often than not just a little "damaged" before the costermonger brought them—heaped all night in one of these Belle-Isle fever-dens on the same floor on which the sack and straw bed is made, to be taken out to-morrow and sold and eaten raw or made into pies and puddings by the thrifty poor, who before everything, look out for what is cheap! I saw under one gateway several hundreds of herrings split open and hung up to "cure" in that hotbed of pestilence.

It is not nice to talk about such matters; it was very far from nice to investigate them; but, since such vileness exists, has existed doubtless for years, and will continue to exist for all that the parochial authorities can do to make an end of it, it becomes necessary to expose it for common safety, no less than for mercy's sake. The risk we run in shirking such questions is incalculable. Not because we are far removed from plague-spots are they no concern of ours; not because we are cleanly in our own homes, and take scrupulous care, in a sanitary sense, of every nook and corner from the garret to the kitchen, can we afford, with no more than a disgustful shrug of the shoulders, to dismiss from our minds all consideration of the deplorable condition of the Belle-Islanders. It is not only the residents of Belle-Isle that are in daily danger from its poisoned air. As I have mentioned, there are many factories the operations of which admit of boy labour. I don't know whether the factory inspectors ever visit Belle-Isle, or whether any member of the Metroplitan School Board has yet happened to pass that

way at the hour when the gangs of poor little wretches are respited from their disgusting drudgery. It is always unsafe, with regard to this class of juvenile humanity, to rely on size and appearance as guides in judging of age. Stunted in growth and ill-fed as they are, it is easy to miscalculate by a year or so; but I think I might allow at least as broad a margin as that, and then declare that many of the industrious little chaps that came trooping out of the match factories and other factories near at dinner time, had not yet witnessed their ninth birthday. All of them were ragged and hideously dirty, and, so far as might be judged by the little of their complexion that was accidentally brushed clear of its coat of grime, they were one and all sickly and unhealthy-looking.

I wish that a member of the School Board would find leisure to look in on Belle-Isle some fine dinner time or evening. I think it not unlikely that his benovelent eyes would be opened to the fact that the bold and easy-going youth who is proud to be known as a street Arab is not the only young person who would be benefited by his fatherly attention. The street Arab, at his worst, is a homeless, ragged, wretched little waif, who will tolerate semi-starvation, but beyond that point may not be relied on to keep his hands from picking and stealing; so he is a proper object for rescue, and it comes cheap for the country to take him and place him at a trade by following which he may obtain an honest livelihood. But who would think of apprenticing him to a lucifer matchmaker, or a worker in chemical compositions, the handling of which would certainly enfeeble his health, and bring him to an early grave? Did only half a dozen such instances occur, the whole nation would raise its hands in horror at the deliberate barbarity; yet here, in Belle-Isle, and a few other places that might be mentioned, we have hundreds of poor, patient little boys and girls, who never in their lives did a dishonest thing, kept in ignorance and doomed to work through their young lives in dirt and squalor and the very shadow of death, for little if anything more in the shape of wages than the free street Arab contrives to pick up in his vagabond rovings.

THE NORTH DEVON SAVAGES.

STRANGEST of all strange company was that which, in my journalistic peregrinations, it was my lot to fall in with in North Devon. At first the vague rumours of a veritable savage tribe existing at a remote place called Nymet Rowland was received by the British public with incredulity. At the nick of time, however, I received from the good minister of the parish such information as decided me to make the journey, and if possible glean, as an eye-witness, some particulars of the manners, habits, and customs of these modern barbarians who were scandalizing the land. Without daring to breathe a word of my intention to anxious friends or family, I made the first step towards invading the barbarian stronghold by taking a North Devon ticket at Waterloo Railway station.

Nymet Rowland, approaching it across country, is about a mile from Lapford station, on the North Devon line. The village is not numerously inhabited, but it contains several substantial farm-holdings, a sprinkling of the handsome residences of gentlemen farmers, and a venerable and goodly-sized church. Almost within the shadow of its ivy-clad square tower is to be found the kraal of the savage tribe of Cheriton. Hut, hovel, stye, or whatever else it should be termed, it is in every respect inferior to anything in the way of house architecture that can be met with in the most barbarous regions on the earth.

A mandan of the Indian prairies would laugh to scorn such an effect at hut-building; a man-eating Fijian would regard as a wanton insult the suggestion that the hideous structure at Nymet Rowland might serve as a pattern useful to be followed in his construction of a dwelling-place. Carved and painted warrior as he is, he has at least some notions of decency and domestic life, and of home comfort for those dependent on him. He will take care that his house is shut

in from the inquisitive gaze of neighbours by a wattle wall or latticed fence; and, with no other material at his command than rough-hewn timber, grass, and reeds, he constructs a clean and commodious habitation, not uncommonly with some attempt at ornamentation in its exterior.

Within the hut of the Fijian will be found a fire-place, even though it be nothing more than a slab of stone edged about with a curving of iron-wood; he recognises the utility of doors and windows, and weaves mats for the floor. Even the benighted Esquimaux, who has nothing besides snow to serve in the place of bricks and mortar and timber, somehow contrives a house of which he has no reason to be ashamed. He provides a window of thin fresh-water ice in the wall of his snow-hut; and he has raised seats for his family and guests, covered first with a layer of whalebone, then with sealskins or deer pelts; and all within is made as snug as possible.

But the barbarian tribe of Nymet Rowland, squatting amid the model dairy farms and mellow apple orchards of Devonshire, are less fastidious in their domestic economy. They care no more for the house they inhabit than the pig does. The pig indeed! I can imagine with what disgust and scorn a daily-scrubbed, milk-and-bran-fed, white prize Windsor pig would curl his dainty snout were he condemned to pass a single night in the crazy, breezy hovel in which the individuals who have earned for themselves such unenviable notoriety are born, are bred, and pass their lives. To be sure, the premises in question give shelter to pigs as well as people; but they are pigs of a bad sort—unhappy animals which have had constantly before their eyes the villainous example their owners and fellow-lodgers have set; and therefore it cannot be expected that they should be so delicate in their tastes as pigs more fortunately circumstanced.

The savages of North Devon are by no means shy. The threshold of their abode, although not exactly on the highway path, is not so far removed therefrom that it would not be quite easy for the passer-by to pitch a penny piece into any one of the yawning holes in the wall or roof, partly mended with wisps of filthy straw. The building is not large, and it is difficult to decide whether it was originally a

farm-house, a granary, or merely a cow-house. It is perhaps forty feet long by twenty-five feet wide; its walls are apparently a mixture of lime, mud, and pebbles, and very thick; and the thatched roof is surmounted by a wide-mouthed chimney partly blown down. The front of the hovel may be made out with tolerable distinctness from the road. There are several apertures, designed and accidental; but the main opening, which I suppose is designated by a window, is a jagged hole about seven feet high and five wide, into which, by way of window blind, ragged bundles of straw are piled.

This was the inviting domicile for which I was bound; and the closer I approached, the more vividly rose to my mind the current stories of its redoubtable inhabitants—of the eldest son, the lawless villain with a gun who, on the smallest provocation, or none at all, would let fly at a peaceful neighbour; of the shock-headed amazons, who, from concealed parts of the premises, hurled bricks and other unpleasant missiles at strangers. I thought, too, of the offensive farmer who, guilty of no crime more grave than that of looking over the fence behind which these savages dwelt, was set on and so terribly cut and mauled, that, in the words of the local guide book, "he bears the marks of his barbarous treatment to this day."

There was a gate—a five-barred gate—with its posts rotten and sunk all aslant in the ground; and between it and the "house" such a quagmire of black mud, that it looked more like a pitfall for the inquisitive and incautious than a path to be trodden by visitors. Besides this, it was a gate with a curious crook for a fastening; and, one way and another, I deemed it advisible to make my presence known before I proceeded any farther. I shook the gate and rattled on it with my stick; and from amid the bundles of straw I have mentioned as piled in the great jagged hole at the front of the premises was protruded what, in consequence of the hair growing over the eyes, could be recognised as a human head only by the open mouth and remarkably white teeth. The eyes in the head having from behind its covert of thick hair, contemplated me for some little time, the head was withdrawn, and one of a larger size

filled its place—a female head this time, with a face tolerably clean, and a pair of cheeks rosy as any Devonshire milk-maids; a "devil" of a face all the same, with high cheek-bones and a retreating forehead, and eyes deeply set in their orbits.

Like the first inquisitor, this one had, as I believe most savages have, a splendid set of teeth, but, oh! the voice that proceeded from between them.

"Well, what is it?" It was the voice of a full chested "navvy," grown hoarse through long toil in tunnels and deep railway cuttings.

"Well, what is it?"

"Have you got a drink of water to give to a thirsty man?"

She did not say she had not, nor did she say that she had. She appeared undecided on the matter; and I thought it a good opportunity for unhitching the gate-fastening, and walking in—slush, plash—through twenty yards of mud that covered my boot-tops. Then I had a fair view of the savage interior through the opening before-mentioned.

A mud floor, walls black as soot, and full of chinks as a child's dissecting puzzle with the bits wrongly placed together; and overhead the roof, through which protruded faggot-sticks and smoke-dried blades of straw that had dropped through holes in the rotten ceiling above. The depth of the place might have equalled that of an ordinary dwelling-house; and through a great gap at the farther end, partly curtained with a piece of frowsy red baize, came a breeze that bore on its wings a strong odour of pigs and their favourite food. The porkers, however, were not yet in sight. The visible living creatures within the shanty, besides half-a-dozen cocks and hens and a duck or two, were seven human beings—an old woman, three young women, a girl of about twelve, a boy of about fourteen, and a baby.

There was not a single article of what could be called furniture to be seen—neither chair, nor stool, nor table. Ranged against the wall to the right was a long rough-hewn bench, and above it was slung a shelf on which were stacked a few odd bits of crockery, five or six yellow quart

basins, and an old earthenware foot-bath patched and tied round with string, which, since a ladle reposed in it, and the idea of feet-washing among such a community was simply ridiculous, I presume was the family soup tureen. On the bench were a pile of onions, a monstrous loaf or two of hearth-baked bread, a battered tin pail three parts filled with milk, a ragged old saddle, and some jars and bottles containing apparently medicine for cattle.

There was no fire-place; but a ruddy glow smouldered from a hole in the floor of the earth, and over it, by an iron chain, a cooking pot was suspended. Round about the fiery pit hole, squatted on their hams, were two of the young women and the younger girl; while the fourteen-year-old lad was prone on his belly among the ashes, with his hideously dirty face resting on his infinitely dirtier hands, and his keen eyes twinkling through his matted hair. They all wore clothes of a sort, and the young women had shining eardrops hanging from their ears. I renewed my application for a drink of water, and, emboldened by the fact that no savage of mankind appeared, accompanied the request with a second—"Might I get a light for my pipe at the fire?"

A general stare, and a rumble of masculine laughter on the part of the damsels by the fire-hole, were the only immediate response; so, seeing no other way in, I stepped round to the back of the hovel, and putting aside the red baize curtain, walked in. The pigs were a slght obstruction. An enormous black sow, with monstrous flapping ears and an iron ring through her snout, was sprawling in what, from its recognised relation to the rest of the building, might be designated the back parlour; while nine or ten little piglings, as fierce-looking as herself were eagerly besetting her for natural nutriment. This impediment overcome there was nothing to bar my way to the fire.

Bad as they may be, these North Deven barbarians—bestial, filthy, and inexpressibly vicious—they at least exhibited towards me, a chance visitor and complete stranger, an amount of hospitality that smote my conscience hard when I reflected how little I deserved it. A damsel of the tribe, aged apparently about twenty, with thick clouted

boots on her feet like those of a maltster, and a white rag bound about her muscular jaws, caught up an antique pot or piggin of red clay, capable of holding, I should say, a couple of gallons. This she took out, and brought it back full. Then she got a little jug and half filled it with water out of another vessel, filled it up with milk, and presented it to me with the polite observation that "she wished as how it was cider, but they were quite out of it."

"You're a stranger?" said she, interrogatively.

I nodded.

"Don't know the passen" (parson), "or any of them in these parts?"

"No; shouldn't know them if I saw them."

"There, I told thee so," said she, turning to the others; whereon, as though it was the constant recreation of their lives, and my entry had interrupted it, there arose a family chorus of the foulest abuse and cursing, directed against "passen" and all his friends, that might have made my blood run cold, only that I was stooping over the red-hot chumps and sticks to get a light for my pipe.

"Parson a bad sort?" I ventured to enquire.

"A reg'ler old ——," spoke the young gentleman in the ashes, deftly picking up a stick with his toes, and thrusting it into the fire; "that's what I'd like to do wi' passen," a sentiment which was highly applauded by the rest, one of the girls adding, in far more idiomatic language than I dare use, that she would like to perform upon the gentleman in question the operation of disemboweling.

"He don't come here very often, I'll wager," I remarked, wickedly joining in the hideous laughter. This crowned the joke. Come there! "Passen" come here! The little villain in the ashes was so tickled that he almost stood on his head, his mahogany-coloured legs writhing convulsively in the air; while a comely squaw of thirty, who as she sat in the dirt was engaged in patching an old pair of corduroy trousers with some twine and a carpet needle, flung aside her work to grasp her sides, they ached so with laughter.

"You're a droll 'un," exclaimed the old woman, grinning till she showed her toothless gums. "Passen come here! ho! ho! Gi' he some more milk, Lisa."

"I suppose the old fellow is too wide awake to chance it," was my next irreverent remark, for which I humbly beseech the clergyman's forgiveness.

"He ain't old, —— him; he's young enough to take a young wife," returned the female savage, named Lisa. "He got married a bit ago, and come up with his—(it was a mercy that the villainous epithet she applied to the bride did not sear her heathen throat)—and we all of us went to the gate to gi' 'em a warmin'. Ha! ha! ho! ho! She won't forget us more'n passen will. It'll make him hotter agin us than ever, —— his carcase!"

I wanted to prolong my stay a little, so looked about for an excuse; and at that very moment the baby which the old woman was nursing thrust its little face forward, and presented a convenient, though at the same time an appalling, pretext for talk. It was a ghastly contrast, that between the nurse and the child. The former was a creature wrinkled gray, and hideously dirty, but still with some tigerish light in her deep-set eyes, which, combined with her flat, backward-slanting forehead, and her hard-set thin lips, betokened the constitutional inclination to vice that tempted her to the dreadful path she had entered forty years ago, and which still sustained her in that path unashamed and dauntless. This was the female founder of the savage tribe by which she was now surrounded, and her arms held the last fruit of the inhuman stock—a five months old, as I was informed; but there were more than as many years of suffering in its poor little yellow, pinched face, its weak watery eyes that blinked shyly at the light, its frothed lips, and the sickening sores that disfigured it.

"Does the doctor come and see it?" I asked.

"He don't come here, he'd be afear'd; nobody comes here;" the old hag replied, with an ugly grin. "I takes it to the doctor, but he don't do it any good; and I ain't goin' to stand his humbuggin' any longer. It's been like it ever since it was born; the biles come up on it, and they break and leave sores. Look here." As she spoke, she turned the helpless infant savage over, and showed me its neck and shoulders; and glad indeed was I to escape from the sight on pretence that my pipe had gone out again, giving me an

excuse for turning towards the fire. There was another baby somewhere—I had learned that previously—and some allusion was made to it by a member of the family; but I could not see it anywhere, and I did not care to appear too curious. I did not like even to ask to which of the three strapping wenches present the poor little horror belonged.

And here I have to touch on the most repulsive and scandalous feature that distinguishes the North Devon haunt of savagery and its occupants. The facts are simply these: Here is a man—Cheriton by name—who takes a woman as his mate; and the pair agree to defy decency and goodness in any shape for the remainder of their lives, and "to do as they like." The den they inhabit at the present time is that in which more than forty years ago they first took residence. They can afford to keep aloof from their neighbours, their homestead being surrounded by about forty acres of good land, their own freehold. In the natural course of events, they have children; their daughters grow up and have children, and the latter in turn grow up and become mothers; but no one ever yet heard of a marriage in that awful family, or ever knew any male stranger to be on visiting terms with it. The only adults of the masculine sex ever heard of in relationship with the Cheritons are the old man, Christopher; his eldest son Willie, aged thirty-five or so; and the fourteen-year-old youth I have already mentioned.

They decline communication with the world outside the boundary hedges of their estate. Accidental encounters with civilized beings are invariably accompanied by conflict, physical or verbal. No one knows when a child is about to be born in this mysterious settlement, for they dispense with the service of a doctor and nurse each other. No one knows to whom a child belongs when it is born, nor are the neighbours usually aware of the fact until by chance some one gets a glimpse of the infant two or three months afterwards. Supposing the members of this awful tribe to be so inclined, they might dispose of their infant dead and nobody would be the wiser. The horrible suspicion is, that they herd together like brutes of the field, and breed like them.

Thus saith rumour; and my personal observation enabled

me to gather what may be regarded as corroborative evidence in support of much of it. The ground-floor of the hovel is at once the living-place, the cooking-place, the pig-stye, and the sleeping-place. As I have mentioned, not a single article of furniture is contained within it; there is not even a bedstead. The family bed, on which repose savage old Christopher, Willie his middle-aged son, the old woman, the three strapping daughters, the big boy and the big girl, and the smaller fry, including the horrifying baby or babies, consists of an accumulation of foul straw, enclosed within rough-hewn posts driven into the earth.

It has been said that the tribe sleep in a pit; but if so, the pit has become filled in with fresh "layers" till now it is raised nearly two feet above the level of the ground. The bed space is about that of the floor of a country waggon, and in or about it not a vestige of sheet, or rug, or blanket was visible, thus there seems no choice but to suppose that they burrow in the straw like rats or ferrets, and so keep themselves warm.

That they are more decent in their behaviour than they used to be, is allowed by very good authority in Nymet Rowland. I was informed by a gentleman whose extensive estate joins that of the savages, that not more than two years since, it was quite common to see dreadful old Christopher sunning himself at noon, with nothing but a wisp of dirty rag slung round his waist, his body being otherwise perfectly naked, except for the dirt that begrimed it; while the daughters, grown women and mothers, thought nothing of attending to their daily farm duties, clad airily in a single garment of calico.

The most incomprehensible part of the business is, that the Devon authorities, who have effected a partial reform, are not strong enough entirely to wipe the disgrace from their country. If the horrors proved, and the dreadful suspicions whispered, came to civilised ears concerning some benighted tribe at the Gaboon or Tierra del Fuego, every community of Christians, with missionary power at its disposal, would be roused to immediate action, and the whole religious world thrown into a state of commotion, until the happy day when it was announced that the barbarians had been brought to

acknowledge the iniquity of their ways, and had given substantial security against longer continuance in them. But Nymet Rowland is not in a savage land. It is in the heart of fruitful Devon. You may take a railway ticket at Waterloo Station at noon, and arrive at Nymet Rowland in time to see grandmamma savage slinging the iron pot over the fire-hole to brew tea for the evening meal.

Whoever sets about the task of converting the savages of North Devon should, however, be thoroughly apprised of the attending difficulties. He should be a man accustomed to barbarians in grain, to their manners and customs—a Moffat, a Livingstone, or a Williams. Savagery is in the blood of the Cheritons. It is a fact that a brother of the present old Christopher Cheriton, Elias by name, was even more strongly tainted than the latter with the family malady; but by some merciful dispensation of Providence, he lived and died a bachelor. Elias Cheriton resided at Whitsone, which is not very many miles from Nymet Rowland. Like Christopher, Elias was freeholder of land to some extent; but unlike him he had not a house or a hut to live in. He lived *in a cask*, with a few rags and some straw, just like a make-shift mastiff-kennel. The cask was placed under a hedge that skirted one of his own broad meadows: and it was his serious declaration that there was nothing on earth so handy as a tub to live in because one could shift it about according to the quarter, from which the wind blew.

Elias, however, though he neglected his land, was famous for rearing poultry—making caves and breeding-places for them in the earth all round about the spot where his gipsy kettle was slung, and where he sometimes cooked the meat he ate; and when he died, which is no more than two years back, he was able to leave to his dear brother Christopher between three and four hundred pounds. Of the five-and-thirty or forty acres owned by the Cheriton savages, not a fifth part is under cultivation; it being their practice to grow no more than suffices for their personal consumption, and that only in the way of potatoes and cabbages, and a little wheat which they dry and grind for themselves. They breed a few sheep —a mere dozen or so. They hire no labourers, the whole family engaging in the necessary field-work; the females

helping at the plough, assisted by an old horse and a bull.

The animal I have just mentioned was out of work when I saw him, and taking his ease in a field; but, as though determined that all their belongings should be in keeping with their savage selves—the horned brute has the reputation of being the most vicious and dangerous bull in the county. The only way of getting him to work yoked with the old horse is to envelop his head and shoulders in a sack; and even then he needs to be pretty sharply watched, lest in his blind malice he should wickedly prod his equine comrade through his sackcloth hood. They are proud of their bull, those wild Devonians. He has never slept under cover since his calfhood, one of the damsels informed me; and she showed me out in the open the tree to which the creature was tethered at nights, all withered and barren in consequence of the bull's fierce assaults on its bark, which was gored and torn all away.

"They'll be home with him presently," said old grandmother savage, who sat rocking the awful baby that was squeaking like a snared rabbit.

"Who will be home with him?" I asked.

"My old man and Willie," she replied.

Willie was the young fellow who had nearly smashed the unoffending farmer; so, inwardly thanking her for the timely hint, I bade the interesting family good-morning, made for the five-barred gate that grew out of the black mud, and sought the sweet highway.

THE ORGAN-GRINDER.

SEEDY, not to say downright shabby individuals, whose habiliments are undoubtedly of Cockney cut, are not uncommonly encountered on a Sunday evening in the course of a stroll through country lanes; nor is the circumstance of a person's sitting on a stile by any means extraordinary. It was his face that first brought me to a standstill. A long, wan, melancholy face, showing a cavernous, whiskerless waste between each prominent cheek-bone and the ledge of the lower jaw, and a chin festooned with a ragged fringe of sandy beard. He wore a cap of the "billycock" order, and it was in all respects a decentish cap, except that, in front of the brim, for the space of a hand's breath or so, it was worn limp and greasy.

I mention this peculiarity of the billycock, because, after a few moments' puzzled contemplation of the lugubrious visage, some vague remembrance led me to raise my eyes in expectation of finding it exactly as it was. In an odd kind of way I recollected him without recognising him. His figure was quite familiar to me; the elongated countenance, the cap, the threadbare brown coat, long in the skirts and ridiculously short in the sleeves, the stoop—or one might almost say the half hoop of the man's shoulders. Bother the man—where had I before seen him, and why did it seem to me that his sitting on a stile in a quiet green lane on a Sunday evening was the very last thing that might have been expected of him?

Presently, however, the riddle was solved in a manner as conclusive as it was startling. The bells of a church in the distance began melodiously ringing, and instantly the figure on the stile pricked up his ears, and looked in the direction from which the sounds came, and, with both hands in the pockets of his breeches, took to drumming with his heels on the stile-bar a sort of rough accompaniment. This amount

of sympathy satisfied him for a short time; but, as the bell music became louder and clearer, he grew more fidgety, and, quite unsuspicious that he was observed, he drew his hands from his pockets, and dropping them from the wrists with apparent unconsciousness, executed certain movements that were unmistakable. It was the action of one who plays on those instruments peculiar to Ethiopian music—the bones.

But my friend on the stile was not an Ethiopian. He was the veritable and original organ-grinder's Bones—the lanky, merry-faced villain who, for goodness knows how many years, had been the companion of various members of that fiendish Italian horde who, by means of a barrel-organ, grind us mad to make their bread—the playful Bones, who capers as he rattles his clappers, who spars up to the organ-man to the tune in course of grinding, and affects to smite him on the nose—ah! how often have I wished he was doing it in earnest—blows sounding most awfully.

The first time I recollect seeing him was during the first time of the first Exhibition, twenty years ago, and he was an accomplished player on the bones then. How came he on this Sunday evening so far from the haunts of his comrades, whose colony, as everybody knows, is within a stone's throw of Leather Lane, Holborn? What on earth had induced him to wander so far away from home? What pleasure could the poor clown of the streets gain by slinking off ten miles from the slums where organ-men do congregate, to smoke a solitary pipe at a spot that was at least a mile removed from any public-house? Perhaps, disgusted with his wretched pay as a clapper-man, he contemplates turning author, and writing a book of his experiences, and had here sought that quiet that was necessary to the maturing of his plans. His experiences! The idea was too good to be lost. Why should not *I* know something of his experiences?

In five minutes more I, too, was sitting on the stile, and a portion of my Bristol bird's-eye was emitting smoke from his stumpy black pipe. Finding that he was ready enough for talk, I contrived that he should have a liberal share of it.

"No, sir; you haven't made no mistake. I am the party you allude to. Goin' it in dumb show, was I? Very likely.

I've been goin' it such a number of years, that I s'pose I'm like them dogs that sets off howlin' when they hear music. I can't help it. Longer ago than the first Exhibition—four years before. Twenty-four years I've been at it. I was quite a little kid when I first took to it—ten years old. Nobody decoyed me away. I took to it natural. I used to do it for a lark, and to put them out of temper; and so they was, till one day I came on one that wasn't.

"I was a hard-up sort of boy, and didn't care much what I did; so that when he said he'd give me a shilling a-day to go about with him, I didn't make no objection. It wasn't a shilling a-day long, though; it was a dodge that took, and we made a lot of money. When the other organ-grinders found that out, they bid more for me—two, three shillings a day; so at last my grinder says, 'We'll go fair whacks in all we get,' and that settled it. I didn't live among 'em at first. I used to be out all day, and come home to sleep. I didn't like to tell the old woman or father what I was up to. I felt kind of ashamed of it, and I used to bring home such a lot of money—six and seven shillings a-day sometimes—and I wouldn't split how I came by it; and the old woman thought I had gone wrong—thought that I went out priggin', you know, and they used to whack me orful; and before they went out to work in the morning, they'd lock up my clothes, right down to my shirt.

"It was a whistling organ-man that first took me up—used to whistle with his mouth to the tunes he played. There used to be a good many of them do it, but they've died out now. Well, I used to hear him whistling after me a couple of streets off. He knowed where I lived, but he durstn't come to the house; so one day I couldn't stand it any longer, so I burst open the cupboard and dressed myself, and ran away from home for good. I went and lodged with the whistling organ-man at his lodgings at Saffron Hill. I lodged among 'em till I got married. Am I? Yes; and got a family, wus luck.

"Wus luck, I mean, because things have got so orful bad. It isn't six and seven shillings a-day now; it isn't two very often. Last Saturday we was out from ten in the morning till dark, and my share was a shilling. Miles of walking?

I should think there was. Saturday I met him in the Caledonian Road, and we worked the Surrey side right round about, as far as Clapham Common, and then had to walk the nine miles home. There isn't no regular way between me and the grinders. Sometimes we go halves; sometimes he will be paid for his day's work—half-a-crown and a bit of something for dinner; and I gets all that is over for myself. Some of the grinders—not many—have their own organ. Most of 'em hire 'em, and what they are supposed to pay is half what they earn.

"They are a very honest lot amongst themselves, and generally the master—the man who lets the organs and keeps the lodging-house—knows them. Perhaps he owns some land in the district in Italy they come from, and has got a lot of their relations working for him there. That makes it more secure for the master, of course. I never heard of a grinder stealing the organ lent to him. I once knew of one who thought he would try his luck in the country, and who got drunk and pawned his organ at Uxbridge for two pounds; but the pawnbroker had to give it up without payment, and the grinder got three months. How many organ-grinders do I suppose there are in London? Not more than eight or nine hundred now. They all live at Saffron Hill, except a batch of about forty, who lodge at a house in Short's Gardens, Drury Lane.

"Organ-grinding is nothing like what it used to be. Oh, yes, the organs are better—there's no mistake about that; but the business is fell off wonderful. It is growing a stale game, as they say; and I should think that a good quarter of them I used to know have cut it. Have I any proof? Well, I don't know; but I should say this was a tidy sort of proof. There are two or three organ makers on the hill—Saffron Hill—who deal in second-hand organs when they can get them. Well, seven or eight years ago it was a job to get hold of a good second-hand organ, there was none for sale. Now, if I wanted a couple of hundred, I should know where to put my hand on 'em, and at a low price too. There's no call for 'em.

"How do I 'count for it? Well, I don't think Acts of Parliament have got much to do with the falling off. I

never heard much talk among 'em, about being compelled to "move on" when a householder tells 'em, and being locked up and fined if they won't. They don't feel the fine much. It is paid by 'whip'—I mean a whip round. Say there's forty grinders live in one house—well, forty shillings fine is only a shilling each for 'em, and they're never hard up for a shilling. I mean that. I mean to say that of all the hundreds of grinders I've ever known—except a few drunken ones—I never yet knew one that didn't have a bit of money about him. Lor' bless yer! see how they live. If they only make a matter of twelve shillings a-week they'll save six. How can they do it? Easy. They board partly at the lodging-house where they live. They have breakfast there—a basin of some sort of tea, without milk in it, and a chunk of bread. Well, that's their breakfast. Then at night they have supper; always the same thing summer time and winter time—macaroni soup.

"It isn't reg'ler macaroni. I'll tell you how they make it. Say there's twenty of them. They'll get sixpenn'orth of bacon, and cut it up in little slips, and put it in a kettle with about three gallons of water; and while it is boiling they make a dough of flour and water, and spread it out in thin cakes, and cut it into ribbons, and roll it up like thick bits of bacca-pipe, and mix it in with the bacon-water—that's all; they charge twopence a pint for it, and if you're a lodger you're bound to have it—at least, whether you do or not you have to pay for it.

"Well, as I was a-saying about cheapness. The breakfast and the supper is threepence halfpenny, and the lodgin'—the bed, I mean—is twopence a night. Two in a bed they sleep, but I don't know how many in a room; I never counted 'em. Three-and-sixpence pays for their week's bed, breakfast and supper, and a clean shirt as well; and all they have to buy after that is a penn'orth or two of something in the middle of the day by way of a dinner. Well, I often wonder how they stand it; it must be the constitution they bring with, them I s'pose. They're the low sort when they are at home—field-labourers and vineyard hands; and they earn next to nothing at all. They seldom or never bring their families with 'em. The mother and the young ones keep on

with their regular work; and the father who comes here and turns grinder, sends over a bit of money out of his savings, till he's scraped together the sum he's set his mind on; then he goes home to 'em. Some do this reg'ler, and have nine months here and three with their family at home.

"No; my opinion is that the organ-grinding business is fell off, partly on account of the fiddles and harps which, I dessay, you have seen about, and partly because of the shaky kind of tunes they put on organs now. Music-hall tunes, I mean. They're werry lively; but there's a sort of 'slap-bang' about 'em all that don't agree with everybody. It isn't so respectable as the old tunes. What I mean is that these music-hall tunes—'Hop light, Loo,' and 'Champagne Charlie'—are more aggravatin' to serious families than good solid operas and that; and so they are set against organs of all kinds. Of course it's a good thing for a music-hall singer to get his particular song set out on the organ. I've known 'em—one of 'em in particular, what's very thick with the nobs and swells—give as much as five pounds a organ for his favourite songs to be set on 'em.

"Seven-and-sixpence is the trade price for setting a new tune on a organ. Comic or sentimental, it's all the same. Some organs are all comic—jig-organs they are called; and they are the hardest-worked, and go the rounds in the lowest neighbourhoods. I've only heard 'em called jig organs lately, since the young 'uns in back streets have took to dancing to 'em—dancing in reg'ler parties, I mean. Oh, yes, it's quite a new thing, and it's spreading too. Round about Whitechapel in the warm weather of evenings, the jig-organs do very well sometimes. So they do over the water. The young 'uns club their ha'pence; and sometimes the mothers and fathers, admirin' of 'em at the doors and windows, will chuck out a copper or two as well.

"I don't mean to say they all do bad. There are some grinders who have superior opera instruments, and who are reg'ler top-sawyers of the purfession. Evening is their time. They never think of going out till four in the afternoon, and they've got their reg'ler beats round the West-End squares and that, and make a very pretty thing of it. They ought to make more than the jig-organs: the instruments cost

more. Four-and-twenty pound a good opera organ costs, and a common one fourteen or sixteen. They're orful heavy to carry about, those opera organs—over sixty pounds, every one of 'em. The common organs are heavy enough. Forty odd pounds they weigh; and some of the grinders will be out with 'em from eight in the morning till eleven at night every working days of their lives. I should say that, take it all through the year, a organ-grinder of the common sort earns about fourteen shillings a-week for himself. Playing the clappers is easier work, you think? Well, you see, there are different ways of playing clappers. I find it orful hard work. It gives me such pain between the shoulders, and keeps me layin' awake o' nights.

"Do I know of many boys that are brought here by padrones? There used to be a regular swarm of 'em, but the magistrates stopped that. You won't find one—either a hurdy-gurdy, or white mice, or guinea-pig boy—where you might one time find twenty. The boys take care of themselves as soon as they find the chance. As soon as they came to know that the magistrate was on their side, it was all over with the padrone ill-using 'em, or getting a living out of 'em for that matter. They're naturally a laying-about lazy lot of little beggars in their own country, and as soon as they found out that the man that hired 'em and brought 'em over was bound to feed 'em, and daren't wollop 'em, they let him have a nice life of it. He used to be afraid to offend 'em for fear they should put themselves in the way to be locked up and get him fined forty shillin's. And now, if you've no objection, I'll make a move, and see about gettin' towards home. It ain't often I get a quiet sniff of the country, and I shan't forget this one. Gord bless you, sir, and thanky werry hearty, I'm sure!"

So he went his way, and I went mine.

AT AN AUCTION "KNOCK-OUT."

In the placard that announced the coming sale, "twelve for one o'clock" was the time mentioned for the auctioneer to mount his rostrum; and as early as half-past eleven, the bar of the public-house nearest to the unfortunate dwelling doomed to be sacked was crowded with a choice company of that peculiar class of persons who make a living—and not at all a bad one—by "attending at sales."

So they themselves modestly describe their avocation, should a stranger venture to make enquiry; but amongst themselves they are "skinners," "knock-outs," and "odd-trick men," and they work together in what the elegant language of the profession calls a "swim." At a glance, however, it was evident that the element in which the knock-outs commonly "swam" was not water. Men, as well as women, looked as though they had recently taken a dry bath in the dust of old carpets, and given themselves a polish with an unclean duster. An unsavoury, shabby lot, attired for the most part in suits which an old clothesman would not have purchased at the rate of half-a-crown a suit, and wearing hats so battered and greasy that the same enterprising individual would not have picked off a dunghill; yet there they were, having half-an-hour to spare and a little preliminary business to arrange, indulging in six-pen'orths of hot brandy and water and in glasses of the best ale, with an ease and prodigality that bespoke the prosperity of the business in which they were engaged.

Evidently, however, it was not a business the nature of which might be openly discussed. There was one gentleman with a nose of the vulture pattern, and who was chiefly remarkable for the dirtiness of two enormous ears that stood out from his head, so that they looked more like ugly rosettes to the brim of his greasy old hat than natural appendages; this was the captain. There was nothing in his appearance

to mark him as a man of wealth, but the respectable demeanour of those about him proclaimed him unmistakably their chief. Every member of the unclean "swim" held in his hand a catalogue of the "furniture and general household effects" that were presently to be brought under the hammer, and every man and woman there licked the tip of his or her black-lead pencil as they all listened to the whispered instructions of the gentleman with the enormous ears, in order to make an unmistakable note against the printed item under discussion.

The males of the swim addressed this important personage as Ben; but the women, with an eye to ulterior business, did violence to the natural expression of their faces in a desperate effort to appear amiable, and, in accents bold or wheedling, called him "Benny;" while the wofully-shabby few who were not of the elect, but humbly "hung on," swigged pots of fourpenny as they kept a respectable distance from the initiated, and wriggled their bodies devotedly towards him as they politely blew off the froth of the pot replenished, and drank "Your 'ealth, Mister Benjamin!" A wary old swimmer was Benjamin! He had explored the upper chambers of the house doomed to demolition under the hammer of the auctioneer, "in consequence of the death of the late proprietor;" he had dived down in the lower regions, and overhauled the cutlery, and the plated goods, and the "small but choice stock of wine" in the cellar; and he had weighed and estimated the exact market value of every item that the dwelling contained, from the warming-pan hanging against the kitchen wall to the elegant full-compass walnut pianoforte in the drawing-room.

I may as well here explain that I was no mere eaves-dropper at this select assemblage. With the connivance of a traitor in the knock-out camp, I, too, was in the swim, and was at perfect liberty to make notes on the margin of my catalogue in cypher all the time that I was supposed to be "ticking off" the bed and bedding in the second floor front, and the fender and fireirons in the parlour. As one o'clock drew near we marched to the house round the corner, where two lengths of shabby stair-carpet were feebly fluttering from the upper windows.

The sale was to take place in the parlour, and the trestles of the ironing-board from below, as well as the kitchen-table, had been utilised in making a sort of platform, at one end of which the auctioneer's rostrum was perched. There was a tolerable sprinkling of intending purchasers of respectable appearance already assembled, but the "swim" knew its business too well to feel the least disconcerted at that fact. Mr. Benjamin was a wary general; at one keen glance (after friendly nods of recognition with the auctioneer) he read the exact position of affairs, and proceeded to take measures accordingly. Grouped together were six or eight well-dressed persons, including three ladies, and they were bent on securing. "We can do without that there lot," growled Mr. Benjamin in an under-tone, as he indicated the "lot" in question with a backward jerk of his dirty thumb.

The hint was sufficient. Before twenty might be counted, half-a-dozen fish of the "swim" had worked their way where the respectable group was standing, and quite surrounded it. Simultaneously half-a-dozen limp and unclean cards were produced from as many waistcoat pockets, and pressed on the acceptance of the respectable folk. "Anythink you wants *we'll* buy for you, mum. We're the trade—the brokers, you know. Five per cent. is our commission."

"Thank you, we can buy for ourselves, if we feel inclined.

"Oh! well, don't you make any mistake. *We* wants everythink here; we're the trade, don't you know, and if you *are* a lady you won't run your head agin the trade. You'd better tell us what you wants."

The respectable "lot" remaining obdurate, however, a change of tactics was at once resorted to. Each unshaven shabby blackguard of the gang at once exerted all his cowardly ingenuity towards making himself as disgustingly annoying as possible. Everyone knows how powerless decent people are in the hands of an equal number of roughs at close quarters. The accidental brushing off of hats, the elbowing and treading on toes, the sofa pillow that is thrown by Brown over to Jones and falls short and strikes a lady in the face, the stable-yard "chaff," the practical joke, the coarse and brutal conversation shaped and aimed with a purpose. Mr. Benjamin's gang was eminently successful.

Before a dozen lots were disposed of, the party specially attacked had made its escape, while others of a like class, who had attended the sale prepared to pay for such of the widow's goods the best they would realise, shrank from competing with the blackguardly fellows, and remained silent and amazed spectators.

Had I not been previously aware that such scenes are almost invariable at small-house furniture auctions, I should have found it difficult to believe the evidence of my eyes and ears on the present occasion. Literally no one had a chance of bidding for anything but the "skinners" and the "odd-trick men;" and if they did so, they were made to suffer. In the slang of the clique, they were "run up till they were out of breath."

The "running-up" process is simple and peculiarly effective. An innocent individual having a fancy for an article—a picture, say—bids for it, and has previously fixed the sum he will give at two guineas, which is the picture's full value. The clique want the picture, and bid in the most spirited manner against him, capping his extreme bid with a further one to the extent of half-a-crown, and so raising the mettle of the innocent bidder that, not to be out-done, and to settle the matter at once, he calls, "Two-seven-and-six." "Two-ten," exclaims one of Mr. Benjamin's men. And a very good thing, too, the reader may say. If people will be obstinate and wrong-headed they should pay for it; and since the widow in whose behalf the goods are sold gets the benefit, there is no harm done. But the reader has not yet heard the finish of that spirited bidding for the picture.

"Two-ten!" cries a knock out.

"Two-twelve-six!" exclaims the weak-minded, though rash Briton.

"Three pound!" and an audible giggle amongst the skinners and odd-trick men. "Going for three pounds!" and down falls the hammer.

"For you, Mr. Davis," says the auctioneer.

"*Me!* Lor' bless yer, me bid three pounds for a daub like that! Ho! ho! that's good;" and he appeals to his confederate skinners, while they as one man swear that Mr. Davis has not once opened his mouth.

"It was that ginelman over there" (the Innocent) "who bid three pounds," they positively assert, and recommend the auctioneer to insist on his taking it at that price. But by this time Mr. Innocent smells the trick, so, thanking his lucky stars that he was not bit, he backs out of the transaction, and, according to the auction rules, the lot is put up again and re-sold. No one ventures now to touch the picture but Mr. Benjamin's men, and without further fuss it is knocked down to that enterprising firm for seventeen shillings.

The leading principles of the conspirators are intimidation, bullying, and barefaced, baseless insinuations against the goods under sale. As I have mentioned, the melancholy reason why the auction was held was, that the head of the house had been cut off by death. Indeed, the poor gentleman had died of consumption, but only his immediate neighbours knew the fact.

Small-pox was prevalent, and that was the dastardly weapon of which the shabby crew availed themselves to get the widow's beds and bedding at about a sixth of their fair value. On the appearance of the first feather bed, Mr. Benjamin, with great solemnity, wished to be informed had it been thoroughly disinfected.

"Disinfected of what?" the auctioneer asked in surprise.

"Oh! there's no occasion to mention it; it ain't a werry pleasant subject," grinned Mr. Benjamin. "I don't care, I've been waxinated myself."

Mr. Auctioneer vehemently protested against the insinuation, and Benjamin and his men roared with laughter, and said it was only a little joke. It was effective, however. Beds, bedding, bedsteads, everything that pertained to the sleeping chambers, became the property of the conspirators without a shadow of opposition. Altogether a very fair haul was made, and when it was all over, a merry band of "knock-outs," we adjourned to the public-house, at the bar of which morning refreshment had been taken, and there, in a private room and with the door locked, we proceeded to divide the spoil.

Mr. Benjamin, as master of the ceremonies, took the chair at the head of the table, having first procured, from the landlord down stairs, change for a ten-pound note in silver,

which he piled in a heap before him. Every knock-out had his catalogue and pencil in his hands. "Lot the first is the parlour chimney-glass. Thirty-five shillings it fetched; I'll give two pun' ten. Anybody give more?" No one seemed inclined to give more, and Mr. Benjamin, taking fifteen shillings from his heap, laid them apart. "The drawing-room suite," continued the man with the large ears, consulting the catalogue, "it was agreed that Mrs. Simmons should have for seven pun' ten. Six pound it fetched, and so we'll trouble you for thirty bob, Mrs. S." With cheerful alacrity Mrs. S. responded, and the pile of fifteen shillings on the table was increased to two pounds five.

It will be needless to enumerate the various articles that were so disposed of; the examples given will sufficiently explain the knock-out principle. When the knock-out gentry, by hook and by crook, have scrambled into their clutches all they want, the goods which have figured in the farce of sale by auction are submitted to fair competition, and realise something like their value. For instance, the bedding already mentioned on being "lumped," was found to have cost thirteen pounds. "I'll give twenty," said Mr. Benjamin. "Twenty-one," cried Mr. Davis. "Twenty-two and brandy-and-water round,"—and Mr. Benjamin was again the purchaser at a cost of placing nine pounds on the table for the "good of the company." Occasionally, however, the increasing heap is called on to pay a "deficiency." The clique is compelled at times to give really more than the value for goods, so as to keep the game in their own hands. "These here vauses—they fetched a awful lot more than they ought," said Mr. Benjamin, dolefully; "one pun' three! who'll take 'em at a pound—nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, sixteen! Yours, Mr. Abrahams;" and Mr. Benjamin, to whom the vases were "knocked down," took seven shillings from the savings heap and put them in his pocket.

When the spoil was all divided, the money heap on the table had increased to nearly twelve pounds, and there were eight of us to divide it amongst. As I was understood to be "in," I took my share and dutifully returned it per post-office order to the person who certainly had most right to it — the widow, who by the kind permission of her worthy

landlord, was permitted to reside in the kitchen of her late well-furnished house until a more prosperous tenant could be found to take possession of it.

And now comes the question who is to blame for the cruel injustice—robbery it might almost be called—of which the case recounted is an example, and which, it may be fearlessly averred, is of every-day occurrence. It being an undoubted fact, that, in the majority of cases, those unfortunates who are compelled to give over their household goods to be sold by public auction suffer cruelly through the dishonest "dodges" practised among the members of a well-organised band of conspirators, it becomes a question, in what direction shall we turn for a remedy?

Is the auctioneer at all responsible for the malpractices of those ruthless devourers of the widow's goods and chattels? He is not altogether guileless. A short time since, being present at a private house sale, I was witness to a dispute between the auctioneer and one of the harpies in question. It was concerning some article which the clique had been manœuvring to obtain at about a tenth of the real value, but which somehow slipped out of their clutches. "Look ye here!" exclaimed the exasperated knocker-out, the captain of the gang, I think he was—addressing the auctioneer, with his dirty face distorted with fury, "I've followed you these six 'ears; I've believed in you, and stuck to you all through. But never no more! I wouldn't give you another bid—no, not if it was to save yer!" And growling in approving chorus, the whole gang left the room.

Now, herein lies the key to the mystery. There is scarcely an auctioneer of third-rate practice in London who has not his "followers." He is not intimate with them, but they are on terms of easy nodding acquaintance,—and he knows every man's name and address—in fact, keeps a register of the same—and can form a tolerably shrewd guess at each one's means, and the sort of goods in which it suits him to deal. As soon as a batch of new catalogues arrives from the printer's, the auctioneer's first care is to see that each one of his professed followers has one duly arrived by post, with perhaps a line—if he be a follower constant and faithful—as to the probability of this or that lot's going "easy."

At the same time I should wish it to be distinctly understood that I do not accuse the auctioneer who so acts with being in dishonest league with the clique; nay, from his professional point of view, his conduct may be justifiable. His reputation and success depend in a great measure on his being able to command a good "attendance;" and there can be no doubt that, if free and uninterrupted competition prevailed, better prices may be obtained from the larger number than the few. In all probability auctioneers would tell you that it would be impossible to conduct their business with satisfaction to their clients, unless they took this precaution, and thereby ensured the attendance of the "trade." By so doing they provide against the possibility of an auction with no buyers, or, in the case of an "unreserved" sale, of what may be yet worse—the chance that ten or a dozen private people may happen to drop in and sweep off the whole property at whatever price they chose to give for it. The attendance of the "trade" ensures bustle and attractive excitement. It comes with its carts and its vans, and it comes with its hangers-on—the poor shabby pack who humbly waits on the well-to-do dogs of the chase, and who will in their small way back their interest, and, if need be, swear that black is white, on the chance of securing a mouthful of bread and cheese and a pot of beer when the time comes for dividing the spoil. They come with their baize aprons and their brazen impudence, to lounge in knots at the gate and at the street-door, and in a measure they serve as does the banger of the gong at the door of the caravan, in which the dwarf and the fat giantess are on view. They call the attention of the public to what is going forward, and promote the gathering of a crowd out of which may come bidders and buyers.

So far, the auctioneer's "followers" do no harm; but there will creep in the suspicion of harm beyond all this. The "follower" has his choice of leaders, and he very naturally attaches himself to that one who gives him the greatest amount of satisfaction; which simply means the one who is most obligingly disposed to put "good things" in his way, and to keep a sharp look-out for those small but significant gestures, those nods and winks in which he, the "follower,"

finds it so much more convenient to indulge during the sale than in out-spoken bidding. In short, the auctioneer who is most in favour with followers is he who puts most money in their pockets.

The mischief wrought, however, by those sharks of the auction trade, who confine their operations to the wreckage of private houses, is as nothing compared with the monstrous iniquity that is daily and hourly perpetrated by a different class of auctioneer—the colleague of the unscrupulous petty loan monger, and, it is to be feared, but too frequently his confederate. Let us pay a visit to Mr. Slaughter's private auction rooms. Those whose good fortune it is to reside in the same street in which Slaughter's auction rooms are situated have nothing to complain of on the score of lack of amusement. As a rule, they are treated to about three stirring spectacles a day, and in each one a vehicle of some kind—a van or cart—laden with household goods, figures conspicuously. Each cart or van has a man at the horse's head with a determined hold on the bridle, and a man behind, not unfrequently in company with a member of the police force; while bringing up the rear there is sometimes a woman with a scared white face, plentifully shedding tears, and uttering protestations and entreaties; sometimes a man—a shirt-sleeved mechanic, or a person of better class in decent black, furious with rage and indignation, and vowing vengeance on some thief, or band of thieves, that have robbed and ruined him. The inhabitants of the street have grown so used to this species of entertainment, that they scarcely take the trouble to look out at the door or window to see it, but it is prime fun for the surrounding courts and alleys, who follow the procession, and just as the humour takes them, deride the policemen and the men in custody of the goods, or make disparaging remarks respecting the goods themselves.

As a rule, the latter are remarkable not so much for their quality as for the extraordinary stowage in the vehicle that contains them. Tables and chairs have evidently been pitched in helter-skelter; drawers are sliding out of the chests that properly should contain them, with their contents all revealed and spilling about; beds and bedding, loose and huddled together with carpets full of dust, and evidently

just as they were snatched up from the floor; fenders, crockery-ware, fire-irons, books, washing utensils, and bed-hangings, all huddled in pell-mell confusion, like nothing so much as if the whole load had been rescued by clumsy hands, and only just in the nick of time from some raging conflagration.

Every consignment of household goods that so makes its appearance is bound for the Auction Rooms, which are ever open to receive it. Not unfrequently it happens that, seeing, as it were, the jaws of the place open to swallow his tables and chairs, his bed and his bedstead, the desperate person behind, whose complaint is that he has been heartlessly ruined and despoiled, will make a frantic effort to storm the cart, and repossess himself of his own. But at this point the policeman interferes. There is no use in kicking up a row. The parties that have seized had the power to do so, and he is bound to protect them. If there is any thing wrong, why, there is a law for one party as well as for the other, and they can settle it afterwards. So the invariable ending is that the furniture is lugged out of the vehicle as hastily and unceremoniously as it had been pitched in, and lodged within Slaughter's gate, leaving the men at liberty to drive away with the van, the policeman to go about his business, and the bereaved ones to make their way back in wretched plight to what, three hours ago, may have been a comfortable home.

It is only on a Thursday that the casual observer may obtain a clue to all this mystery. Let him then pay a visit to the back street in which Slaughter's Auction Rooms are situated, and he will find the aspect of that establishment entirely altered. The shutters are down, and the offices and the extensive store-rooms at the side are now open, and numerous placards announce the business afoot. Ten or fifteen big posters are exhibited on a capacious board: all relate to the Thursday's sale of furniture at Slaughter's and every one bears on its face the ominous words, "Under a bill of sale." Look close into the placards, and you shall discover, if you are curious in such matters, that in every case it originates with the owner of a loan office, who, empowered by a bill of sale has done his worst towards some unlucky defaulter.

Mr. Slaughter's business depends almost entirely on loan-office patronage, as many as ten or twelve of the leading "monetary establishments" on the Surrey side of the river, which make advances of ten or even fifteen pounds, bring their "seizures" to him, knowing him to be a man highly respectable, and eminently snug in his dealings. It is a branch of the loan-office business that requires a discreet agency. As the trade is now conducted, the selling up of clients is the main staple of profit, but it would never do for that to be a fact generally known. If loan-office proprietors distributed their seizures amongst auctioneers indiscriminately, there are, under the new system, so many of them, that borrowers would at length open their stupid eyes, and the game would be in a great measure spoilt. The bill-of-sale game, I mean. It is quite a modern idea as applying to financial advances on a small scale, but it works splendidly. Time was when, if a borrower and his surety could not pay, there was nothing left but to carry the better of the two before a county court judge, and abide by his decision, which was always, be it related to the judge's credit, one that was tempered with mercy for the defendant; but the intervention of a bill of sale wonderfully simplifies the recovery of the debt, and its 60 or 80 per cent interest. And the best of the joke is, that nine times in ten, the said bill is obtained without the knowledge of those who render it.

It is a delicate operation, but people—especially people who are driven to the verge of despair for a few pounds—are such simpletons. All that occupies their thoughts is to touch the money already counted out before them, and it is not until that trying moment that the winning card is played. It is done "in a rush," as the vulgar saying is, and it is not once in a dozen times that it miscarries. The way has been paved before. A day or two since, when the borrower's friend presented himself to tender his security, the clerk in command remarked in an off-hand way,

"I needn't ask, sir, are your circumstances sufficiently good to enable you to pay this money, should you be called on to do so?"

"Oh, of course."

"You have a decent house of furniture?"

"Oh, yes."

"Just—for form's sake, you know—give me an idea—no matter how rough a one—of what it is comprised. Feather beds or flock?"

"Feather, sir," replies the surety, loftily. It isn't *he* who wants money.

"Precisely. Feather beds and bedding. I'll just make a memorandum, for the look of the thing; though, of course, in a case like yours it is all nonsense. Tables—how many four?—five! thank you. And chairs—say a dozen and a half. Chests of drawers, two?—we don't need to be particular. Carpets, of course, and I daresay a chimney-glass and a few pictures. All right, sir; that will be near enough. If you will call with your friend any time to-morrow, he can have the money."

Perhaps the surety—especially if he be a green hand at such matters, is rather amused than otherwise at the fanciful inventory taking of his goods and chattels, but he sets it down as the ordinary routine of loan-office business, and thinks no more of it. Next day he calls at the office with his friend, whom he is good-naturedly obliging, and while the money is being counted out, he is asked to sign the promissory note. Then—with the money in his hand, and as though it were a matter that had almost slipped his memory, and might just as well be done as not—the clerk says, "Oh, ah! there's this memorandum of your goods. Just pop your name at the end here, as an acknowledgment that they *are* yours!" And the fatal pen, already dipped in ink, is handed to the unsuspecting one, and, seeing neither good nor harm in the act, in a moment it is done.

It is incredible, altogether past belief, that the success of modern offices for the loan of paltry sums depends on this manœuvre; but it is a fact nevertheless. It is rarely that the truth is exposed before a magistrate, but when it is, the victim invariably declares that he never signed what purported to be a bill of sale, and that such an instrument was never mentioned during the negotiation. If asked what it was that he did sign, the reply is, "A mere scrap of paper with the items of my furniture jotted down on it." "Do you think it could have been this very document, with the upper

part folded over?" "Well, it may have been." "And do you mean to tell me," says the incredulous magistrate, "that you were so foolish as to affix your signature to a paper of the nature of which you profess to be so ignorant that you cannot tell whether it was a folded paper or not?"

Well, it is astounding, but such things do happen. As the victim on the preceding day left the document, it was merely the skeleton of a bill of sale, with the printed technical wording, and spaces left for filling in. It is not till the conclusion of the transaction that the loan-office clerk, at his leisure, fills it in with as much liberty to set what value he pleases on it as though it was a signed bank cheque. One day at Slaughter's Rooms I had an opportunity of examining three of these nefariously obtained securities, and in the worst case of all, it was made to appear that a man who had lent his name to a friend for the sum of £7 10s. had been hoodwinked into giving the loan-office shark a bill of sale authorising him, in case of default in payment of any one of the agreed-on instalments, to come and peremptorily take possession of "the goods herein mentioned," or any others that may be found on the premises, to the value of £27, by the sale of which the said shark might satisfy himself in the matter of "balance due," with any amount of "expense" he might please to heap up. This was a bootmaker in a small way, and there being £4 15s. still unpaid of the loan, he had been "troubled" for £11 8s., and not only had all his furniture been seized, but his little stock of boots and shoes, and the poor fellow, who had managed to scrape together £7 or £8, was there on the auction day to try what he might buy back.

As it seemed to me, almost everybody was there whose goods since the preceding Thursday had been pounced on and swept away to Slaughter's. You might tell them by their haggard, anxious visages, and by the way in which, as brethren in misfortune, they kept together, and compared notes of their grievances. They never will learn wisdom, these people. Having been fleeced by the loan-office people, they flock here to Slaughter's, and tender their carcases to the butchers of the auction room for disjointing. Were they so utterly friendless that there was no one who would

open their eyes to the act of simplicity they were committing when they ventured to that sale room to buy their own goods? No doubt it was the auctioneer, or one of those shabby harpies that haunt his premises, that advised the step, but it was only a trap to catch a poor bird already maimed.

They know how the matter stands—the pack of hungry brokers' men, and the scoundrelly touts and "commission agents" who attend Slaughter's place. They know a man's affection for the home that has been built up and bettered year by year by dint of self-denial and extra spells of work, that meant extra shillings for the savings' bank. True, there is not much romance in tables and chairs, or in a Kidderminster carpet, or a loo-table, or a chimney-glass. Whatever the pattern may be, you can match them for money any day of the week, and they will be just as substantial and useful—the chairs to sit on, the table to spread a dinner on, and the looking-glass to make splendid the mantel-shelf; but if there are two words more than any other two opposite in signification, they are *home* and *newness*. To be a real home, solidly comfortable and satisfactory, every item that comprises it must undergo, under the roof-tree, a process of mellowing and ripening; and though meanwhile a considerable portion of its original gloss or polish may be rubbed off, an armchair or a dining-table at which every day of the year the children assemble has a more than compensating amount of affection rubbed into it. When the familiar old home is ruthlessly broken up, it is no more than natural that a man should feel a yearning to pick up the pieces, and endeavour to restore something of the original shape.

It is this weakness that takes so many anxious faces to Slaughter's sale-room on a Thursday; and again, it is this weakness that causes to gather there the grimy, hawk-eyed horde of brokers' men. They are present to keep watch, and take care that the despoiled ones, who are so ridiculously bent on reclaiming their goods, shall not do so unless they pay handsomely for their sentimental whistle. I am unable to say who hires these fellows, or whether, in shabby malice, they attend there for the brutal fun of the thing. Anyhow,

there they were, and it required no uncommon degree of penetration to discover that their chief aim was to take note of every bit that was made by an unfortunate whose goods had been seized and "run him up" most villainously. I feel quite convinced that many persons there who had come to repurchase their furniture, might have got it, taking it at its market value, at half the sum they had to pay; but it was a value much more precious than that of the market that these poor creatures set on their feather beds, their children's cribs, and other articles sanctified by long and loving usage. They stuck desperately to their intention of making them once again their own, and often enough the auctioneer's hammer fell amid the derisive laughter and unsavoury "chaff" of the broker crew, who telegraphed to each other by winks and gestures, and seemed to be on terms of easy acquaintance with the auctioneer.

But it was only a few selected articles that these impoverished ones could afford to buy—articles that were needed for the immediate necessities of the family, such as bedsteads and bedding, and a table and a few chairs. After the doubly-sweated victims had taken their departure, then came the time when the hungry pack of brokers' men, who had been "running up" the prices, earned their reward. It was stern business now, for under the conditions of the sale the goods must be disposed of without reserve.

No more chaffing or horse play. They didn't quarrel much over the tit-bits in shape of lots that the auctioneer threw to them from his rostrum. Occasionally, some discontented dog snarled and growled a little when he thought that he had missed a bite at something or other; but, as a rule, except for their clamour to the auctioneer "not to dwell, sir," but to knock the rubbish down, they were orderly enough—as well they might be, for the goods "knocked down" belonged to no one at present. Only three or four men were making the bids, which were kept discreetly low, as they easily might be, when there was nothing in the shape of competition going on. The various lots were merely being collected together out of the auctioneer's hands, to be fairly apportioned amongst the members of the pack, when by-and-bye it assembled at the "knock out."

There is a public-house within a stone's-throw of Slaughter's that possesses the advantage of a very large club-room. This is where the knock-out—*i.e.*, the division of the spoil—takes place. I was informed by the confiding potman that ever since Slaughter had "took to the bill of sale business, there wasn't a Thursday but there was quite a mob of brokers and brokers' men settling their business upstairs."

And all this mischief and ruin inextricable comes of the want of a simple Act of Parliament regulating the doings of petty loan-office keepers. The law is stringent enough as regards pawnbrokers and "leaving shops," why cannot its repressive hand be laid on these devourers of the poor, whose bait is "money without security," but who, having hooked their gudgeon, strip him and flay him without mercy?

BONNETS IN LIMBO.

In a recent conversation with the Rev. George Hough, chaplain at the Westminster House of Correction, he took occasion to remark, in terms emphatic and forcible, on the growing evil arising out of the unwholesome craving after "finery" indulged by the number of the ornamental sex. It would appear that the pernicious maxim, "One may as well be out of the world as out of the fashion," is taken so earnestly to heart by hundreds of maid-servants and workers in factories and City warehouses, that they act up to it literally, and stake honesty, honour, and liberty on the chance of winning and wearing a style of attire, as unfitted to their station as was the plumage of the peacock with which the vain and ambitious jay in the fable attempted to adorn itself.

The Rev. George Hough is a gentleman whose voice, on a matter of such importance, should command respectful attention, since there are few in England who, on account of experience, position, and shrewd sense, could be better entitled to speak. Mr. Hough is chaplain in one of our largest prisons—a prison that is occupied solely by women—and he has held that position for a number of years. It is part of his duty to see, and converse with, every prisoner on her admittance, with a view to gaining a knowledge of her antecedents, and so ascertain if her disposition may warrant his intercession to reclaim her from ways of sin, and to place her, on discharge, in some home or reformatory. At present there are shut up, in the twenty-one blocks of grim brickwork and iron grating that the walls of the Westminster House of Correction enclose, over eight hundred female prisoners; and since the term for which they may be committed is as little as three days, it may be easily understood that the inflow and outflow must be tolerably constant.

On the day when I visited the prison there were forty

"new" cases; and there they were, looking the very perfection of penitent thieves, in their sable serge gowns and their plain white calico caps tied under the chin, all in a row in a lobby outside the chaplain's office, in the custody of two female warders with clanking chains at their waists. The majority of the new comers were young—twenty or twenty-five. It was not easy to realise that they were gaol-birds but newly trapped: that only yesterday, or the day before, many of them were gaily-bedizened creatures, with freedom to flutter about wherever they choose—light-hearted roysterers, on whose giddy heads was built a fashionable pyramid of horse-hair and padding, on which to perch the modern monstrosity humorously called a bonnet. There are no chignons here—no crimping, waiving, and plaiting. I am not sure, but I was led to infer from the awfully plain manner in which the hair under every calico cap was worn, that not so much as a hair-pin is permitted. Straight and flat on the temples, with a crisp knot behind, is the stern fashion for female *coiffure* at Westminster. Truly it has always seemed to me one of the most faulty features of the criminal law, that only those who feel it can form any idea what is the weight of the law's chastising hand, and what a terrible purge for pride and vanity awaits those that ride in the black coach through the prison gates. Bang goes the door, click goes the great bolt in the socket, and good-bye to the pleasant vanities of the world!

I had come, however, to see the feathers, rather than the birds of this great and gloomy aviary. That which happens to the still inmates of the Morgue at Paris befalls the unwilling tenants of the House of Correction; for they are deprived of all articles of apparel in which they arrive. Who does not know that grim sight of the French Mortuary—the suits of clothes hanging by scores above the silent dead upon the slabs? Blouse and victorine, *pardessus* and pelisse, sabot and slipper, swing in mid-air, and tell many an eloquent tale of those who wore them.

I wanted to see the cast-off raiment of those who, for the time, are civilly dead in the Westminster House of Correction, and to judge how far the chaplain was borne out by the general appearance of this plumage of crime and sin. Every new prisoner is stripped to the skin, and, when she

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has passed through the water of the jail, is clothed from crown to sole in an infamous garb—coarse clout shoes, prison-wove stockings of heavy worsted, under-clothing that is little better than canvas and is branded with a prison mark, and a gown of common serge, such as pauper's cloaks are made of, and as plain as a winding-sheet. This, with the hideous cap, is the dress.

The occupation is working in the prison laundry, or scrubbing prison floors, or tearing to shreds, with the fingers, masses of old ship cable with a fibre close set with tar, and hard nearly as wood. The lodging is a little whitewashed vault, with a brick floor, lit by a grated window; the food is wholesome, but grimly "plain"—dry bread of unbolted meal gruel; that is, simply oatmeal boiled in water and flavoured with salt; and pudding of Indian meal, which, to the unused palate, resembles a preparation of fine sawdust. And in hundreds and thousands of cases this is the ending of a rash and reckless—not invariably a naturally vicious—girl's craving after that flimsy and ridiculous finery which her honest means will not enable her to obtain. As I have already stated, forty women had just been admitted; next morning there were possibly as many more; and out of that number, according to the worthy chaplain's correct reckoning, at least one-fourth find their way there through yielding to the insane weakness of dress. One cannot help thinking that if the hundreds of foolish ones who at the present time are resolving, "come what will," by hook or by crook, to become "fashionable" members of female society, could be favoured with a sight of this sad company of Westminster prisoners who have soared as they meditate soaring, and have fallen so miserably low, it might lead at least those who have not quite taken leave of their senses to reflect whether the delight of wearing for a brief space a headgear trimmed with ribbons and flowers, high-heeled boots, and a flashy dress with a "pannier" should be indulged in the face of a probable three or six months' banishment from the world, the white-washed cell, the harsh fare, and the oakum-picking—to say nothing of the disgrace that sinks in so deep, and can be eradicated but with such miserable slowness.

But not for the sake of inspecting the prison arrangements had I visited the Westminster House of Correction: my curiosity was centred in one department. Said the reverend gentleman already mentioned in this report: "If any proof were needed as to the reasonableness of my statement regarding 'dress,' I could, if it were necessary, quote the names of some hundreds of girls who, according to their own statements, have commenced their downward career in consequence of their having yielded to the temptation I have just named. I would point out the wretched exhibition which may be seen in the rooms set apart in our prison for the reception of the private clothes of prisoners during their detention in custody."

My purpose was to obtain a view of that exhibition, and I succeeded in doing so. It was a curious and, until one got used to it, a somewhat bewildering spectacle. The two rooms which I was favoured by being permitted to inspect were not the only ones pertaining to the establishment that are set apart for the purpose; for, as well may be imagined, it requires no inconsiderable space to stow away the wardrobes of eight hundred women. Under such circumstances it is necessary to economise space; and this is done at Westminster in a very methodical manner. I had expected to see the moulted plumage of every female prisoner hung up on its separate hook against the wall; but the authorities have a neater way. From floor to ceiling, on all sides, are what might be called "pigeon holes," if they were smaller. Each compartment is about eighteen inches square, and contains a prisoner's clothes, including even her boots, tied up in a bundle, every bundle being surmounted by a hat or bonnet. This was the remarkable feature of the exhibition. The pigeon-holes were, as a rule, shady recesses; and as the bonnets were, so to speak, planted each on its bundle, it seemed at first glance as though so many women were lurking in the pigeon-holes, and thrusting their heads out.

But one did not need the living face and form to tell you the story—the bonnet told it plainly enough. In common with all mankind, I had been accustomed to regard bonnets as meaningless and frivolous things; but that review of bonnets in prison converted me. There are articles of attire that

are always more or less eloquent of the habits and conditions of their wearer. Old gloves are so, and so are old boots. I would in many cases sooner trust to a pair of ground-down-at-heel, time-mended, weather-tanned boots to tell me the story of their master's travels, than I would trust the man himself. Similarly, I believe one might place the most perfect confidence in the dumb statements made by the bonnets and hats perched atop of the bundles.

As bearing out the worthy chaplain's declaration, it is a fact that at least seven in every ten were headgears of a "dressy" type, and the crowning glory of the wearers. Here was a hat, a tiny coquettish article of the Alpine order, with a flowing feather, and ribbons that were scarcely creased. The process of compression which they had undergone betokened the ample skirts of silk and velvet, and possibly the expensive and fashionable mantle, confined within. No other than an expensive and fashionable mantle could be associated with such a hat as that; and, as plainly as though it were there substantial and visible, appeared, under the rakish little lace "fall," the elaborate chignon on which it was mounted. The warder reaches down the humiliated "Alpine," and there, pinned to its ears, as it were, is a paper ticket, on which is written the simple record: "Maria B——, four months." Four months, and of that weary time barely two weeks have elapsed. Here is Maria B——'s Alpine hat. Maria B——'s chignon is ruthlessly crushed in her bundle, thrust into one of her high military-heeled boots perhaps; and Maria herself, who, for a little while commonly drank champagne, and wore rings on her white fingers, is plunged elbow-deep in prison suds, washing dirty worsted stockings; while, if she works well and sticks to the tub without flinching for a matter of nine hours or so, her reward will be nearly half-a-pint of prison beer.

Who can doubt that "Maria B——," in the loneliness of her whitewashed cell, does not often wonder what has become of her clothes and her hat? They will be hers one day again. At the expiration of four months the bundle and the hat will be rendered up to her, and she will have to give a written acknowledgment of their restoration. Will she

ever find courage to wear that hat again? In four months it will have faded, and the depressing atmosphere of the prison will have taken the crispness out of its trimmings; but, even had it been kept in a bandbox—there is the ticket on it. She will unpin it, of course; but there are the pin-holes in the ribbon, and she will hate it on that account, and her ears will tingle with guilty shame should she suspect that any human eyes are attracted to that particular spot—as if all the world knew that the hats of those consigned to prison were condemned to share their owners' disgrace by having a convict ticket affixed.

Bonnets in limbo keep strange company. In the next nook to that where roosted the haughty Alpine, reposed, atop of a bundle no larger than a quartern loaf, a confused saucer-shaped mass of plaited straw and dirty ribbon, that looked as though it had long been used to the pressure of a basket, and smelt as though that basket had been accustomed to contain fish. It had the better of the Alpine, however, despite its ill condition and general appearance of blowsiness; for, as its ticket declared, it was only a drunken and abusive bonnet, and would be free to go about its business in a fortnight. In the next compartment was a hat with feathers, and in the next, and the next four—all as much alike in style as doubtless their owners were in character. Such, at least, might be inferred from their sentence of durance, which in each case was four months.

Then came a very remarkable bonnet—a gaunt, rawboned, iron grey straw, of parochial breed. It was such an enormous bonnet, and the bundle it accompanied was so diminutive in size that the former was not perched atop of the latter as in other cases; indeed, unless it had been proficient in the art of balancing itself on its front rim, it would have found the feat impossible. It straddled over its bundle, which was partly lost within its iron grey jaws, as though bent on swallowing it. How the workhouse bonnet came there I did not enquire, nor did I ask for how long its lodgings had been engaged, or of what crime it had been guilty. Perhaps it was for "making away" with a portion of its clothing—the diminutive size of the bundle certainly favoured this

supposition, and getting drunk with the money. This, however, must be said, that it looked much more abashed at its degrading position than many of its sisters there; and one could not help hoping that the wizened old face it had been accustomed to overshadow would soon be restored to it, and convey it out of that shameful place.

In some of the nests I observed that there were two bonnets, and when this was the case it happened pretty often that they were exactly alike. Here were a pair of the sort—of French grey velvet, trimmed luxuriantly with green grapes and the foliage of the vine. They were slightly the worse for wear, and battered in at the crowns, which had a pulpy look, as from constant battering. At a glance one might perceive the class to which they belonged—the night-prowling, tavern-frequenting class, so well known to the police that a tremendous amount of daring and dexterity on the part of its members is required to enable them to "pick up" enough to procure gin and finery. They are thieves of course, and they hunt in couples. The two grey bonnets were a pair, the tickets pinned to them showing that they had been convicted on the same day for the same term. Knowing that both bonnets and bundles will be required on the same day three months hence, they are thus conveniently kept together by the prison authorities. So surely as the warder at the gate has let them out, so surely will he, a month or so afterwards, let them in again, and the bonnets will be once more stowed away, while the women, in a perfectly free and easy manner, will take to the serge gowns and calico caps, and make themselves at home. Indeed, creatures of this class—and at Westminster House of Correction alone they may be reckoned in scores—appear to regard the prison as their proper home, and their freedom as a mere "going out for a spree," which may be long or short, according to luck.

A remarkable feature of this prisoners' wardrobe is, that the more magnificent the bonnet the smaller the accompanying bundle—a fact which tells most eloquently what a wretched trade these women follow, and how truly the majority of them are styled "unfortunate." I am informed that nothing is more common than for these poor creatures

to be found wearing a gaudy hat and feather and a fashionably made skirt and jacket of some cheap and flashy material, and nothing besides in the way of under-garments but a few tattered rags that a professional beggar would despise.

And these are the habiliments in which, on bitter cold winter nights, they saunter the pavements, and try to look like "gay women." Gay! with their wretchedly thin shoes soaking in the mud, and their ill-clad limbs aching with cold, until they can get enough to drown sense and memory in gin. Gay, with their heart aching and utterly forlorn, and hopeless, and miserable, homeless, companionless, ragged and wretchedly clad, except for the outer finery without which they could no more pursue their deplorable calling than an angler could fish without bait—is it surprising that they drink until they are drunk, or that they steal when money to supply their desperate needs can be obtained in no other way?

It may be love of finery that in the first instance lures hundreds of girls from the path of virtue; but it is altogether a mistake to suppose that, despised and outcast, they are still content because they wear many flounces on their gowns, and flowers and feathers on their heads. They would reform if they could reform. They hate the life they lead, they hate themselves, and so they go from bad to worse; and the temporary deposit of these bonnets in the prison clothes-room finishes with their leaping a bridge in the delusive gay garb, or carrying it away with them to some distant convict station.

A "SLY HOUSE" ON SUNDAY.

THERE was nothing in the least attractive about it; and unless the attention had been particularly directed towards it, as mine had been, you might have passed up and down the shabby little Whitechapel back street in which it was situated, and observed in it nothing in the least remarkable.

It was just an ordinary barber's shop, the front parlour of one of a row of small houses, with a striped pole jutting out above the doorway, and a window board, on which was innocently inscribed "Shaving, 1d; hair cut, 2d." By the side of the board was a glass bottle, containing some amber-coloured fluid, stopped with a tin funnel instead of a cork, and bearing about its neck a label intimating "Hair oil in ha'porths and penn'orths." Nothing else. If the barber was a professor, he was too modest to parade the distinction. If he was the inventor or vendor of any miraculous preparation, either for banishing grey hair or for promoting early whiskers on the cheek of ambitious youth, there were no outward signs of his enjoying so valuable a possession. Yet the extent of his trade was wonderful. It was Sunday morning, and the church bells, which had just commenced ringing, denoted the time of day to be eleven o'clock; but it was evident that very many of the residents of Little Swallow Street and its neighbourhood were not even shaved yet.

It was curious to note how undecided many of those for whom the striped pole served as a beacon appeared to be as to whether they should be shaved or not. They would shamble leisurely down little Swallow Street in twos and threes, and when they reached the barber's they would pause and look left and right, pass their hand musingly over their stubby chins, and then turn swiftly in at the little door, as though acting on the well-considered conviction that it was, after all, the best thing to do.

I went in with the rest. I had not the courage to be shaved. I had previously witnessed the operation in similar establishments, and had a sickening dread of that shaving-brush, like nothing so much in size and texture as two or three tufts plucked from an ordinary half-worn hearth-broom. I must confess to a rooted antipathy for the soap-bowl and the soap contained in it—bristling as both were with spiky atoms of men's beards, red, brown, and grey, to an extent which suggested the idea that they had been plentifully sprinkled with baker's raspings. I felt that I dare not be shaved, so I had resolved to have my hair cut—just the ends taken off. There were forms and chairs for the barber's customers to sit on, and these they occupied with fair regard for the "next turn."

There were so many customers awaiting their next turn that the front parlour was unequal to their accommodation, and they had brimmed over into the back-parlour, which was the barber's bed-chamber as well as his living-room. This, however, was an advantage rather than otherwise, because the turn-up bedstead, for the occasion turned down, served as a seat for eight or ten of us. It was an uncomfortable, frowsy little den; the barber's two little children and the baby were squalling and fighting on the ground; and the turning down of the bedstead had pressed the barber's wife into a corner, where, at a table partly occupied by unwashed cups and saucers, and the heads and bones of the bloaters on which the family had regaled at breakfast-time, she was busily engaged cutting up steak and rolling out dough for a meat pie. She seemed not in the least embarrassed by the presence of the ten men sitting along the edge of the bedstead, neither did they at having to sit there. They smoked and talked, or read the newspaper, and that in the midst of dirt and muddle that at home would have been altogether unbearable, with a degree of equanimity and good humour that was inexplicable.

Until you found out the reason why. This was the key to the mystery. The barber and his two assistants polished off their customers at the rate of three in ten minutes, and as soon as a man was shaved, and had paid his penny, the barber said to him:

"Would you like to go through and see the scarlet runners this morning?"

To which singular question the man promptly, as though he had expected it, replied,

"Well, I don't care if I do."

Then the barber remarked to the lathering-boy whose business it was to keep a couple of customers constantly napkined and soaped, ready for the razor,

"Joe, show him through."

Whereupon Joe accompanied the shaven one to the back-door of the house, and unlocked it; and so the customer vanished. In one instance, a man whom nobody seemed to know was shaved, and the barber took his penny, and said, "Thanky," and nothing else; on which the customer remarked, in an injured tone,

"Can't I see the beans?"

"What beans?" says the barber, innocently.

"Oh, it's all right," remarked another customer; "it's all right, Mr. Popshort; "I'll go bail for him."

"That will do, then," rejoined the barber, motioning Joe; "but how was I to know?"

I began to rejoice that I had not made up my mind to be shaved. The scarlet-runners were no mystery to *me*, as I had a few days before made the acquaintance of a person who had, Sunday after Sunday, watched their growth from the time when they first pushed their green heads through the earth: but for all that I was not a *bonâ fide* bean fancier. I was a spy and a traitor; and, though a man may carry his countenance very well under the generality of trying circumstances, it is an awkard matter to do so in the hands of the enemy who wields a keen razor, and who has you fixed in a chair with your arms helplessly swathed in a cloth, and your head tilted back till the skin of your throat is tightly stretched. An assault with a pair of scissors is far from pleasant; but I had a good chance of avoiding even this penalty, inasmuch as during the process of taking the ends of my hair off, my head would be bowed, and the barber would not have much opportunity for reading guilt in my face. Besides, I had come provided with a weapon that would disarm suspicion. I was to ask if "Old Bailey" had been there that morning.

There was magic in the words. As the barber give me my fourpence change out of sixpence, he looked as innocent of scarlet-runners growing in his garden as though it were depth of winter.

"Has Old Bailey been here this morning?" I asked. His manner altered at once.

"He'll be here presently, I dare say," said he, cheerily. "Will you have a look at the scarlet-runners?"

Joe let me out into the yard, where a few strings of the celebrated vegetables were trained to grow against the palings. But they were nothing to look at, and they were never meant to be looked at. At the end of the yard there was a door ajar; having the clue, I pushed it open, and found myself in a wood-chopper's shed. Passing through this, I came to a low wall, with a chair close to it to make it easier to climb over; and, having performed this feat, there I was within a few yards of another back door, very near which was a young man cleaning pewter pots. "Straight through," said the young man, and in a twinkling I found myself in the tap-room of the "Hare and Weazel," where there were already assembled at least five-and-twenty young men and old, who, judging from their clean-shaven visages, had one and all been invited by Mr. Popshot to view his scarlet-runners.

This was the explanation of all the mystery, all the manœuvring. The "Hare and Weasel" was a public-house at which, provided he had a mind to undergo the ordeal above described, a man might enjoy the privilege of setting the law at defiance, and indulging in malt or spirituous liquors "on the sly," during prohibited hours on a Sunday morning. To be sure, it was not a very splendid reward after so much trouble. The place was villainously dirty and uncomfortable. There was scarcely a form or a chair to sit on, and the landlord could not have shown himself more tyrannical had we been dungeon captives, and he our jailor. Talking above a whisper met with instant rebuke, and any man who dared to laugh was threatened with peremptory expulsion. "I ain't a-goin' to get into trouble because of you lot," angrily protested the landlord. "You know it's agin the law. I shouldn't be surprised if the perlice was at the keyhole this minnit."

But no one turned pale at the intimation of this alarming possibility. On the contrary, it seemed to give a zest to the illicit proceeding, and the secret company took long pulls at their pewter pots, and winked their satisfaction as they passed the measure to their neighbour. It was an awfully good joke this, defying the police under their very noses—to engage in a deed of daring, the penalty of which, should it be discovered, would be certain fine or imprisonment. It meant much more than appeared on the surface. It meant that as men and Britons we were determined, at the risk of forfeiting our liberty, to uphold our right to drink beer on a Sunday morning, never mind what it cost us.

And, to do him justice, the landlord exerted himself heroically to enable us to exercise to the utmost the virtue of pecuniary sacrifice in the good cause. He had no common porter on tap; no fourpenny ale; no sixpenny even. It was all eightpenny, and drawn from the wood, mind you —so as to avoid the dangerous noise that raising it from the cellar by means of the beer-pulls would make. Perhaps it was this drawing it from the wood that gave the eightpenny such a foreign flavour. Not a strong flavour by any means, but the landlord made a merit of this. "'Tain't likely," said he; "that's because it's genuwine, and hain't had nothing added to it; you might drink a pailful, and not find a headache in it." Judging from its singularly mild flavour, the gin also might have been drawn from the wood, even from the rain-water butt that stood in the yard; but it was the purest "Old Tom," the landlord assured us, and on that account he charged us sevenpence a quartern for it.

During the next hour so many of Mr. Popshort's customers were curious to view his scarlet runners, that the tap-room of the "Hare and Weasel" became choke full; and the landlord, who added a delicious contraband flavour to all he brought us, by adopting a free-and-easy undress, consisting of trousers, dirty shirt, and slippers only, found enough to do in supplying our demands. Whatever he handed in at the guarded door was accompanied by a "Hush!" and a laying of his forefinger on his lips, enjoining us to secrecy and silence; so the thirty or forty of us, huddling together

in the stifling heat of that nasty-smelling little den, drank and replenished our pots and glasses with as much stealthy, malicious glee as though the cellars of the Chief Commissioner of Police himself were under the process of pillaging, and we were draining them dry.

We conversed in whispers, and the most natural thing in the world was that our favourite theme should be the new Licensing Act. Said one man—who seemed bent on practically testing the landlord's assertion, that there was not a headache in a whole pailful of the eightpenny,

"This is summat like the old times, this. Why, we ain't had such a muster here on a Sunday morning, ah, not for months."

"And we shouldn't now," remarked another, "if it wasn't for them coming down so sudden with that there Act. Well, it's only fair that everybody should have a turn. Them there publicans out in the Green Lanes, and them places just far enough into the country for a Sunday morning walk, have had a tidy spell of it with their bony-fidy travellers. They bony-fidy's 'em now when they ketches 'em, don't they?"

"So they do, but it's a pity, *I* think. I like to be neighbourly, of course; but I certainly used to like that stroll out atween the hedges afore dinner on a Sunday morning. It did a cove good, there's no mistake about that; but a man who's used to his half-pint at eleven can't do a baking walk in the sun and go without it."

"'Tain't likely," said everybody.

"But don't you think that its just a spurt and will blow over in a month or so. They'll soon be sick of taking advantage of the precious fog that hangs about the Act, and snaring in the same net them wot says they is travellers, and them wot serves 'em because they believes that they is."

"I don't believe it. It's much more likely that them that keeps public-houses a little way out in the country, where Sunday morning travellers are in the habit of calling, will get that aggravated by the police being down on 'em, that they'll cut the Sunday trade altogether, and keep their houses shut."

"Why, it stands to sense that they will," spoke the

landlord of the "Hare and Weazel"—at that moment handing in and taking the money for half-a-pint of gin and two pots of eightpenny—"and a good thing too. It'll put a stopper on them that's so jolly fond of walking off to take their Sunday morning's pint in the fields and medders, and never caring a button how their neighbours are to live. All right. I've got my eye on 'em. It'll rather astonish 'em when they come here a Sunday morning for me to oblige 'em, and I tell 'em to go and have a look at the green leaves instead. Them and their 'umbuggin' green leaves. Give me a good summer cabbidge—them's green leaves enough for me, and if they ain't, and my appetite wants another tickler in the afternoon, I can always fall back on water-creases."

This noble sentiment elicted loud whispers of applause; and the man who had expressed his liking for a walk between the country hedges, feeling that he, perhaps, was the individual the landlord had his retributive eye on, ordered a conciliatory quartern of rum, and when the landlord had fetched it, and had condescendingly drunk a glass of it, he further enlightened us as to what were his opinions on the clause of the new Act that dealt with Sunday trading during prohibited hours.

"Live and let live, that's my motto," said the landlord.

"All except teetotallers," remarked a sneak, who a little before had "stuck up a pint" till next day.

"Teetotallers included," replied the landlord of the "Hare and Weazel," magnanimously; "they've done me many a good turn, and never a better than when they passed the Act that stopped the Sunday morning out in the country. I approve of their principles," continued the landlord, bestowing a grin and a wink on the company generally. "It is a scandalous thing to see the doors—the front doors, mind you!—of a public-house open on Sunday morning on any pretence whatever. If fellows will indulge in the vicious habit of insisting on their pint on a Sunday morning as well as on any other, they should keep it dark, and not make their wulgarity as public as people coming out of church make their hymn-books and that. If they must drink—and, mind you, they will do that, open or sly, if they take it into their heads to do it—why, let them keep the secret to them

selves, and call at Popshort's and get a comfortable shave, and——"

What else did not transpire, for at this moment an authoritative rapping was heard at the front door, and at the same moment the potboy made his appearance with a pail. Without apology, he seized every measure on the tables and emptied it into that receptacle; and in a twinkling he gathered up every pot and measure and vanished with them to regions below. "Out you go. Sharp's the word. Hook it over the wall. Good luck t' ye!"

And so, ignominiously dismissed, we tumbled over the wall into the wood-chopping shed, and thence made our way to where the scarlet runners grew, and so, one at a time, through the barber's shop, and out into Little Swallow Street.

SUNDAY IN THE "DITCH."

JUST as your old and respected friend named Thomas gets called "Tom," or your dear old and familiar crony Elizabeth becomes "Lizzy" or even "Liz," so do the inhabitants and frequenters of certain parts of Shoreditch speak of it as the Ditch. The Ditch extends even to Bethnal Green. There are various approaches to it. You may take the turning by the Shoreditch Railway Station, which is Sclater Street; or a more direct route is to take Church Street for it, and keep along until you arrive at Club Row, going thence to Hare Street and Brick Lane, and then you are in the Ditch up to your very ears. It is nothing of a Ditch on week days—comparatively speaking, that is. From Monday to Saturday it is as sluggish a place as can well be imagined. A dreary, stagnant pool, swarming with fish, but all so lean, and so bent on hunting up and down for the wherewithal to keep body and soul together, that so much hilarity and cheerfulness of disposition as may be evinced even by the wagging of a tail, is on a week day seldom or never seen there. A murderous locality for trades that employ women and children, a den of the dirtiest and worst paid drudgery for male labourers. But it is not all work. Every Sunday throughout the live-long year there is held in the Ditch a sort of market fair, which is attended by hundreds and thousands.

Winged creatures are the staple of the said market. It is not too much to say that, excepting the dodo and the golden eagle, the bustard, and a few others of the rarer sort, there is not a bird which may not be bought in the Ditch on a Sunday morning. Long before the church bells begin to ring out, from every direction the market-folks begin to arrive; and by the time the bells have ceased their pious invitation, Hare Street and all the adjacent streets are crammed full. It is a marvellous spectacle. Fowls of the

farmyard are carried about in a manner that, supposing them to be fresh from the country, must astonish them indeed. Here a man elbows his way through the crowd with his hands apparently buried in his pockets, bawling out in the voice of one who has just disovered a raging fire, and is anxious to be the first to raise the alarm, "Who'll buy a duck! who'll buy a pair on 'em?" You take him for an agent to a duck-dealer, who is ready to shew you where the birds are should you express a desire to purchase: but some one touches him on the shoulder and inquires, "'Ow much?" And, lo! in an instant he whips a brace of Aylesburys from his coat-tail pocket, where he had been holding them by their necks. Other individuals jostle and squeeze past each other, with bantams hugged to their bosoms, and with live Dorkings and Spaniards dangling head downwards, and carried by the legs, in which apoplectic position they emit horrible sounds and grow alarmingly red in the gills; while geese in baskets poised on the heads of boys cackle with fright as they come into collision with pigeons in boxes on the heads of other boys.

Talk of pigeons! In Hare Street, on a Sunday morning, there must be thousands of them. Every house-roof is surmounted by its dormer, and at least one person in every five that go to make up that great crowd has a "turbit," or a "dragon" to dispose of, or some that he has just purchased. There is a story told of the first English lark that was carried to the gold diggings, at the time when the first ugly rush had been made to the auriferous region, and morality was at a low ebb among the gentry of the pick and cradle, how the heavenly music of the little songster drew the rough fellows from all parts to hear it, and on Sunday morning they might be seen in scores, lying about in the vicinity of the shanty, against the wall of which the lark hung, dreamily smoking their pipes as they listened to its sermon the text of which was Home.

In the Ditch pigeon worship prevails. Coming round a corner I observed, to my amazement, a group of at least thirty men and lads, each with his grimy visage turned skyward, and with eyes that twinkled in ecstasy. Hands, too, were raised and clapped together, as is the way with these

vulgar folk when they are pleasure-stricken. What could have happened thus to enchant them? It could not be the good words of the street preacher; he was too far away to be audible. But presently the mystery was explained. "Whew-w-w!" whistled a youth; "here they is again—Bli'my! there's a flight for yer!" a sentiment in which the others agreed, as they too stuck their fingers in their mouths, and blew a blast of admiration. It was a flight of pigeons wheeling and elegantly deporting themselves above the chimney-pots.

But the chief attraction of the Hare Street Sunday market lies in its song birds, and herein lies one of the most inexplicable mysteries that marks human nature. What natural affinity can possibly be traced between the innocent little carroler of the leafy woods and the alley-bred, heavy-jowled, grimy biped who is here discovered paying homage to its sweet notes, and swearing hideous oaths in support of his assertion that there is nothing in the world he has so much admiration for? Master Muggins's adoration of the sublime and beautiful is not universal. Setting aside his "fancy" for song birds, if young Muggins chose conscientiously to reply to the question: What is the summit, the extreme tip-top of earthly bliss? he would say: "Unlimited beer in a tap-room." If he were compelled to state what was his highest ambition, he would propably be embarrassed to decide whether it was the untrammelled ownership of a donkey and barrow, or possession of that wondrous skill that enables men to "floor," at a single throw with a ball, nine "pins" of wood stuck up in a skittle alley. Just fancy, then, Master Muggins making love to a linnet!—hanging longingly about the cage in which it is imprisoned, and marked "ninepence;" manfully offering sevenpence, "every precious oat I've got in the precious world; bless my precious eyes if it ain't!"—only it is impossible to reproduce the earnestness with which the fruitless bid was made, or indeed give the expressive word for which "precious" is here substituted. It is quite touching to observe the manner in which Muggins removes his dirty short pipe from his dirtier mouth to chirrip fondly to the little bird that might have fondly nestled in his bosom but for that other base twopence.

It is only when one more closely scrutinises Muggins's bosom, and then reflects on that pure and exquisitely clean little nest of moss in which the linnet recently nestled, that one ceases to feel very sorry for the young fellow's disappointment.

And Master Muggins is but a type of hundreds of thousands who crowd the Ditch on the Sabbath morn while the church bells are ringing. There is not a bird that sings which is not represented in this wonderful market. Chaffinches, goldfinches, bullfinches, blackbirds, thrushes, starlings —there they hang in their shabby prisons outside the shops of the bird-fanciers in broad rows, and stacked in solid stacks in each shop's interior.

There were larks—thousands of larks—many of them familiar with bondage, who, in the midst of the clamour and clatter, raised their wonderful voices as though mercifully bent on drowning the blasphemous Babel of human tongues, or at least on mingling with it their sweet song to blunt the sting of the offence as it ascended heavenward. Hundreds of other larks, crazy with fright, were beating their bodies against the iron bars. What a terrible mockery must that six square inches of turf be in the sight of that wronged creature which every morning sprang from the dewy grass towards heaven to see the sun rise! A shabby half shovelfull of sickly green for the bold bird that all his life has owned as many broad acres as his keen eyes could look down on at a half a mile's height! No wonder that his fevered feet spurn it scornfully, or that in dumb agony he cranes his neck and tosses his head, as though, despite his two days' incarceration, he were still incredulous that such a change could be. But this is a sentimental view of the matter, and one which a bird-catcher cannot afford to indulge.

"Who'll buy a lark? Who'll buy a finch? Who'll buy a battling finch? Who wants a finch wot'll 'peg' or sing agin anything as ever piped atween wood and wire?" Rare qualities these to be embodied in one small chaffinch! and so it seemed, judging from the crowd that at once surrounded the individual who clambered up on to a window-sill, and made this last mentioned proposition.

The gifted chaffinch was not much to look at. It was

housed in a rusty old cage, which was tied in a ragged pocket-handkerchief. The man tore a little hole in the handkerchief bigger, and revealed his treasure—a runt-tailed, partly bald-headed, dissipated-looking wretch of a bird as ever one clapped eyes on. "I'll take ten bob for him, and he's worth twice as much," bawled his owner, proudly. "I've had him out a-peggin"—a way of catching chaffinches with a decoy—"and I've sung him agin both Kent and Surrey birds, both kiss-me-dear and chuck-wee-do's, and he was never licked yet. I'd a rung his ——neck if he had been. There must be no two ways about a bird that I keep—yer knows me some of yer?" Several persons in the crowd seemed to know him very well, but I did not observe that they availed themselves of the advantage to eagerly embrace the splendid opportunity he offered them; and the disreputable-looking finch was finally sold, amid much swearing and cursing, for six shillings. And so the fun of the fair was maintained—the police, of whom there were several in attendance, only interfering when words ran dangerously high, or the mob thickened inconveniently at one spot.

It must not be supposed, however, that all this is allowed to go on without the opposition of those whose laudable determination it is to thwart Satan wherever they happen to meet him. Nay, of late it appears as though these high-way heroes of the modern Crusade were not content with such promiscuous encounters. They have plucked up even more courage than of yore, and now boldly track the foe to his stronghold, and tell him to his face what they think of him, in terms so undisguised that were he not, despite his horns and hoofs, an indifferent, good-humoured sort of imp, he might turn about and retaliate. Perhaps there is not anything desperately perilous in the business, but the frantic desperation with which those engaged set about the mission makes it appear so. I had a fair opportunity of observing the process from the very beginning. At the corner of a widish street there was an individual, of repulsive aspect, offering for sale the last published number of a delectable illustrated publication, and holding forth, with a degree of warmth that should have earned him three

months at the treadmill, on the spirited illustrations with which that literary venture is adorned. Here was a foeman worthy of their steel, and the street preachers advanced with a firm step at a rapid pace, within six yards of the man who was shouting, "Who'll have another spicy 'un? Beauty's hunadorned for a penny!"

The standard-bearer halted and planted his standard firmly between the cobble-stones. It was eight feet high at least, the material being japanned table-covering, and on it was inscribed an appropriate scriptural motto. The preaching force was not strong. It consisted indeed of the custodian of the banner, a preacher, and a person with some books, who had charge of the preacher's hat. One would have thought that, under the circumstances, gentle remonstrance and persuasion would have been the method adopted by the well-meaning pastor of the highway; but, to my amazement, he affected the opposite extreme. He lost not a moment in shilly-shally, but seized Satan by the horns at once, and commenced abusing him in a tone and at a rate which must at once have convinced the Evil One that he was now in the hands of a person who not only had no dread of him, but was hot and eager to rouse him to fury, and then give him battle to the death.

The preacher was a short thickset man, with short-cropped hair, and no shirt-collar, and his coat was buttoned over his breast. His gestures were prodigiously energetic, and the consequence was, that before he had preached ten minutes he had worked his wrists well through his coat-cuffs—wrists of a size that matched well with his ponderous fists, which, except when engaged with the prayer-book, were tightly clenched. Evidently he was by no means new to the good work, and experience had taught him the most profitable manner of performing it; but to one unaccustomed to this way of conveying to the incredulous and unbelieving the meek and pacific doctrines of Christ, the spectacle was startling. He was not long in disposing of the illustrated paper man, at all events. The latter, after a volley or two of the choicest Billingsgate, finding that his audience thinned, dismounted from his stool, and beat a retreat, which was the means of securing to the preacher quite a numerous congregation.

It was little short of marvellous how those about him bore the stinging castigation he administered, and the hard terms he applied to them. They were poor purblind fools not to see the advantages of religion; they were robbers, insomuch as they filched the day of rest, and turned it to their own vile purposes; they were cowards, for they were afraid of offending the devil. I don't say that as a rule the hundred or so gathered about were deeply impressed, or that any listener's pipe was put out or his appetite spoiled for the nuts or winkles on which he happened to be engaged when he strolled up. But this much may be said, and it is not a little—not one of that rough and uncouth assembly opened his mouth in sneering or in wrath; not one raised his hand to ward off or resent the severe pummelling of which he was metaphorically the victim. From this point of view the preacher of the street may lay claim to having achieved a victory, and he has my very best wishes.

The instance above recited was not the only one furnished by Hare Street, showing the courageous determination of a worthy, and, I am afraid, ill-requited few, to win the Sabbath breaker from his wicked ways. About midway in this street of evil repute there is what was at one time a shabby little music hall, attached to an uninviting-looking low public house, known as the "Apollo." For some reason or other the "Apollo" has lost its licence; but, so far as outward appearance goes, it is still a public house. There are legends of "cordial gin" and "fine vatted rum" still to be read, and the publican's name still adorns the portal; the doors, battered and greased by drunken shoulders, were half open, and only for one unusual feature the place might still have been an ordinary public house of the slums, doing a bit of sly business on a Sunday morning. The unusual feature was a written placard on the door-post, announcing that Mrs. Someone of Liverpool would preach in the hall that morning; and even as I read, there came from the rear of the premises the sweet sound of voices uniting in a hymn.

I went in, past the bar that was ruinous, past the parlour in which Hare Street heroes were wont to roar their praises of brown beer, but in which now the hats and cloaks and umbrellas of the pious congregation found temporary

harbourage. The hall itself—the music hall—presented a striking spectacle. It was never adapted for a daylight congregation, and, broad, sunny noon as it was, three or four of the flashy little chandeliers over-head were lit; the sickly unreasonable gas illuminating in ghostly fashion the cobwebs and grime in which the disused glass pendants were enveloped. There were the narrow seats and the ledges in front, just as they were last ringed and smeared by the gin-and-water and half-and-half measures, but on them prayer and hymn books now rested.

On the stage, still looked down on by two Shoreditch cupids, was a table—the very table, probably, which that excellent delineator of Negro eccentricities, "Pumpkin Squash," in the rattling old times when the "Apollo" *was* the "Apollo," used to whack with his umbrella during his far-famed stump-oration. At this very table, now decently covered with baize, and supported by three or four of her male admirers, was the highly respectable lady alluded to in the placard, holding forth with no small degree of eloquence, and with her benevolent heart, earnest in the hard work before her.

I am sorry to tell, however, that the congregation was not numerous. The heathen of the Ditch is shy of any kind of enclosure. If you wish to tackle him you must tackle him just where you may happen to find him, and take your chance of his pausing to listen. You have not that claim on his attention which you would have if you invited him into your place of worship, and he accepted the invitation. You are both, in his opinion, on an equally free and independent footing; and he would no more think of questioning your right to preach at the street corner against vice, than he would tolerate your interference with his daily occupation, which is the bawling of "rabbit-skins;" which undoubtedly is a condition of things much more favourable to the brave designs of the preacher than if the said heathen were as blindly brutal as his spiritual aggressor is blunt and plainspoken.

By the time I quitted the "Apollo" it was one o'clock, and the public houses were open, which of course accounted for the streets being comparatively clear.

THE HUMAN HAIR MARKET.

It was recently my privilege to inspect and, for just as long as I chose, linger over the enormous stock of the most extensive dealer in human hair in Europe. The firm in question has several warehouses, but this was the London warehouse, with cranes for lowering and hauling up heavy bales. I, however, was not fortunate in the selection of a time for my visit. The stock was running low, and a trifling consignment of seventeen hundredweight or so was at that moment lying at the docks till a waggon could be sent to fetch it away. But what remained of the impoverished stock was enough to inspire me with wonder and awe. On a sort of bench, four or five feet in width, and extending the whole length of the warehouse front, what looked like horse tails were heaped in scores and hundreds; in the rear of this was another bench, similarly laden; all round about were racks thickly festooned; under the great bench were bales, some of them large almost as trusses of hay; and there was the warehouseman, with his sturdy bare arms, hauling out big handfuls of the tightly-packed tails, and roughly sorting them.

I should imagine that a greater number of pretty lines have been written on woman's hair than on anything else in creation. Lovers have lost their wits in its enchanting tangle; poets have soared on a single lovely tress higher than Mother Shipton ever mounted on her celebrated broom; but I question if the most delirious of the whole hair-brained fraternity could have grown rapturous, or even commonly sentimental, over one of these bales when, with his knife, the warehouseman ripped open the canvas and revealed what was within. Splendid specimens, every one of the tails. Eighteen or twenty-inch lengths, soft and silky in texture, and many of rare shades of colour—

chestnut, auburn, flaxen, golden—and each exactly as when the cruel shears had cropped it from the female head.

It was this last-mentioned terribly palpable fact that spoilt the romance. Phew! One hears of the objectionable matters from which certain exquisite perfumes are distilled; but they must be roses and lilies compared with this raw material out of which are manufactured the magnificent head-adornments that ladies delight in. As to its appearance, I will merely remark that it gave one the "creeps" to contemplate it. Misinterpreting my emotion, the good-natured gentleman who accompanied me hastened to explain that the fair maidens of Southern Germany, to whom these crowning glories had originally belonged, did not part with the whole of their crop.

"More often than not," said he, "they will agree to sell but a piece out of the centre of their back hair, and under any circumstance they will not permit the merchant's scissors to touch their front hair."

Time was when I should have derived consolation from this bit of information; but now I could not avoid the reflection what a pity it was, for sanitary reasons, that they did not have their heads shaved outright.

"Is it all in this condition when you first receive it?" I ventured to inquire.

"As nearly as possible," was my friend's bland rejoiner.

The lot under inspection, a little parcel of a couple of hundredweight, came from Germany. The human hair business has been brisker in that part of Europe than anywhere during the past few years, on account of its yielding a greater abundance of the fashionable colour, which is yellow. Prices have gone up amongst the "growers" in consequence. The average value of a "head" is about three shillings. As well as I can understand the matter, however, the traffic in human hair is based on pretty much the same business principles as those which find favour with the "old clo'" fraternity with which we are familiar. With them articles of china and glass are exchanged for an old coat or a brace of cast-off shoes—a pair of Brummagem earrings, a yard or two of flowered chintz, or a pair of shoe-buckles are offered for a cut off the back hair of the German peasant maiden.

The hair buyers—or "cutters," as they are technically called—are pedlars as well, and never pay for a shearing with ready cash when they can barter. These pedlars are not the exporters, however; they are in the employ of the wholesale dealer, who entrusts them with the money and goods, and allows them a commission on the harvest. I don't think that I was sorry to hear about the Brummagem earrings and the barter system. Since civilization demands the hair off the heads of women, it is consolatory to find that they think no more of parting with it than with a few yards of lace they have been weaving. It comes from Italy as well as from Germany, and recently from Roumania. I was informed that an attempt has been made to open a trade with Japan; but, though the Japanese damsels are not unwilling, at a price, to be shorn for the adornment of the white barbarian, the crop, although of admirable length, is found to be too much like horsehair for the delicate purposes to which human hair is applied.

Brown hair, black hair, hair of the colour of rich Cheshire cheese, hair of every colour under the sun, was tumbled in heaps on the counter before me, *including grey hair*—not much of it, as much, perhaps, as might be stuffed into a hat-box; but there it was, the hair of grandmothers. Seeing it to be set aside from the rest, my impression was that it got there through one of those tricks of trade that every branch of commerce is subject to. That lot was stuffed into the middle of a bale, I thought, by some dishonest packer who, while aware how valueless it was, knew it would help to make weight.

"You don't care much about that article, I imagine," I remarked to my guide.

"What! that grey hair—not care for it!" he returned, with a pitying smile at my ignorance. "I wish that we could get a great deal more of it, sir; it is one of the most valuable articles that comes into our hands. Elderly ladies will have chignons as well as the young ones; and a chignon must match the hair, whatever may be its colour." It was unreasonable, perhaps; but, for the first time in my life, as I gazed on the venerable pile, I felt ashamed of grey hair. It seemed so monstrously out of place.

But I had yet to be introduced to the strangest branch of this very peculiar business. I had inspected packs, heaps and bales of human tresses of every length, colour, and texture; but every hair of it had been shorn, living and vibrating, from the human head. Now, I was invited to look at a lot of "dead hair," in a bale which would make a Covent Garden porter of only average strength shake at the knees before he had gone a hundred yards.

"This is a very extraordinary kind of article," said my kind informant, as he ripped open the stout cloth covering; "this is the 'dead hair' you read of in newspapers and magazines."

Involuntarily I edged a little further from the gash in the canvas.

"But is it *really* dead hair—hair, that is to say, that has been——"

"Buried and dug up again," my friend blandly interrupted; "not exactly, though that is the blundering popular impression. This, my good sir, is an article that is not cut from the head. It is torn out by the roots. It all comes from Italy."

"Torn out by the roots! What! violently!"

"Violently, my dear sir."

I trust that my look of incredulity had nothing of rudeness in it. I had heard of hair being torn out of the human head by the roots—nay, in more than one frightfully desperate case I had seen as much as a big handful produced before a police magistrate to prove the murderous antipathy of Miss Sullivan for Mrs. Malony; but what was that small quantity compared with as much as might be weighed against a sack of coals? Could it be possible that the ladies of Italy were so terribly quarrelsome that——; but observing my perplexity, my friend hastened to explain.

"Torn from the head with gentle violence, I should have said, and with weapons no more formidable than the brush and comb. When I hold the head"—let the hair be living or dead, he called every separate hank of it a "head"—"to the light, you will see that every hair has its root attached, and all that you see here is only a small part of the bulk that finds its way every year to market. It is simply the hair that becomes detached from the heads of Italian women

in the ordinary process of combing and brushing. As a married man, you may know what happens when a lady brushes her hair; she will pass a comb through the brush, give the detached waifs of hair a twist round her finger, and make a loop to it to keep it tidily together till it is thrown away. A like habit with Italian women is the mainspring of our English dead-hair supply. In the poor districts of Italy especialy, the little twists of waste hair finds its way to the washing basin, and so to the street gutter, out of which it is fished by the scavenger. From his hands it passes for the merest trifle into those of the knowing ones, who know how to disentangle the ugly little tufts, to arrange them as to length and colour, and send them to market as you here see them."

As I saw them, they differed little from the thousands of other "heads," piled on all sides, except that they were somewhat shorter. Indeed, they were cleaner looking; but, after what I heard about them, it was difficult to contemplate them without a shudder. They were worth a third less as a marketable article than "live" hair, I was informed; but the supply was abundant, and many hundredweights were used in the course of a year. Many hundredweights; and about two ounces will make a respectable chignon! It is a dreadfully unpleasant fact, ladies, but so it is. To be sure, the perfect machinery used in the preparation of human hair before it finds its way into the hands of the hairdresser ensure its absolute cleanliness; but it is *not* nice to reflect that at the present time hundreds of your lovely sex are crowned with Italian peasant women's brush-combings, consigned first to the slop-basin and then to the street-kennel, to be rescued therefrom by the rake of the scavenger.

INSIDE NEWGATE.

THE gaol of Newgate, regarded merely as a place of safe keeping for evil doers on whom the law has laid a repressive hand, is one of the most uninteresting of prisons. It was the lion of its kind in the old times; but of late years it is shorn of its claws, and has attained a degree of tameness that, in Captain Macheath's time, would have been deemed impossible. The spiked wicket is no longer kept by a fierce gaoler, surly as a mastiff at the mouth of his kennel, but by an affable official, respectful and civil as a well-bred footman.

My cicerone was an elderly and experienced warder, and by way possibly of making known to me in as polite a manner as possible that if I had gained admittance under false pretences and with sinister intentions I should find that I had made a serious mistake, he led the way to an apartment and opened a cupboard, where the fetters were kept—a bright shining row of the modern pattern, with a few examples of the ancient "darbies," such as, I suppose, were used at a time when the art of breaking out as well as getting into Newgate was a branch of the "professional's" education—monstrous things, some of them—and unhitched a pair of wrist-irons from the hook, and they weighed at least a quarter of a hundredweight, and the leg irons to match were even more massive. In the same receptacle, and evidently preserved as precious mementoes of the past, were the anvil and hammer with which at the last moment the cruel blacksmith struck off the galling encumbrance, together with several other interesting relics of the good old time. The irons, I was informed, were seldom or never used now, except when prisoners were in course of removal from one prison to another.

I came on many other things that used to be the pride

and glory of Newgate, but which had been abandoned since the renowned criminal stronghold had mended its manners. For instance, a prison uniform is now unknown at Newgate, and no manner of compulsory labour is performed by the incarcerated. I certainly saw a goodly dose of oakum, but this, I imagine, was for the light amusement of the well-behaved, who found idleness irksome. I saw, too, the black hole—half a dozen black holes indeed—but no one was ever placed in them. Another Newgate institution, observed from time immemorial, is now obsolete—the condemned sermon. I ascertained this from my conductor as we stood in the prison chapel. As of old, to the left and to the right there are spaces in which the criminal congregation is accommodated, railed off from the rest of the sacred chamber, by spiked bars of iron stout enough to secure the most ferocious creatures of prey ever exhibited at a menagerie, and there too was the doomed one's chair (I always understood that he sat in a pew), a stiff and straight-backed black chair which, when occupied, was placed apart from any other seat and in fair view of the parson in the pulpit. But he now participates in the sermon in common with the rest, and is never specially preached at.

But if there is no condemned sermon, Newgate is still faithful to its condemned cell. Except for its terrible associations and for the fact that hundreds of miserable wretches have sat at that table and lain on that bedstead, counting the rapid hours that seemed so hungrily anxious to eat up their dwindling remnant of existence, there is nothing dreadful about the condemned cell. It is about the size of an ordinary underground back-kitchen, and about as well-lighted. There is a little shelf, on which repose the dying man's plate and his pannakin, and his hymn-book and testament, and his Bible, unnecessarily branded "Newgate" on the leaves. There is a very small deal table and a little form, and these last-mentioned articles of furniture, as well as the floor-boards, are scrubbed white, and the vaulted ceiling is white, and the walls. There is many a cell in which a poor man with his family is condemned to live and pay several shillings a week for, in the shape of rent, that is not nearly so desirable a place of

abode as regards cleanliness and good ventilation. There is no fireplace, and the gas jet burns in a little wire cage, presumably to prevent frantic persons from attempting suicide by burning.

I asked whether the condemned, as a rule, gave much trouble; the warder answered unhesitatingly, "No! There were exceptions of course; but generally, after they got over the first fright they settled down wonderfully calm, and remained so until the last," which is evidence that it is in human nature to dread death itself less than the torture of the "cat." It is the experience of every prison official I ever talked with on the subject, that a ruffian, being uncertain as to the morning when he is to have, as he himself would say, "claws for breakfast," is in the habit of lying night after night in a sweat of terror lest to-morrow should be the doleful day.

But there is one feature of Newgate's interior a recollection of which will probably abide in the memory of the man who sets eyes on it, long after all else connected with the grim prison is forgotten—the murderers' burying-ground. When one reads that "the body of the malefactor was the same afternoon buried within the precincts of the gaol," the natural inference is that there is a graveyard, that there is a spot at the rear of the chapel, very likely, set apart for the interment of those who are sacrificed to the law's just vengeance, and that, though the unhallowed hillocks are devoid of head or footstone, there is a registry kept, by which the authorities can tell whose disgraced remains they cover. This, however is by no means the system adopted. The guide, unlocking a door, discovers a narrow paved alley, between two very tall, rough-hewn walls, which are adorned with whitewash. The alley is, perhaps, five-and-twenty yards long, and not so wide but that two men joining hands could easily touch the sides of it, and at the end there is a grated gate.

"This," remarks the civil warder, "is where we bury 'em," and you naturally conclude that he alludes to a space beyond the gate, and that he is about to traverse the alley, and open it. Instead of this, barely has he stepped over the threshold than he points to the letter "S," dimly visible

on the wall's surface, "And," says he, "Slitwizen, who was hanged for murdering his wife and burning her body," and before your breath, suspended by the startling announcement, is restored to you, he lays his forefinger on another letter a few inches off. "Ketchcalf, who cut the throat of his fellow-servant. Brambleby, who split his father's skull with a garden spade; Greenacre, who murdered Hannah Brown and afterwards cut up her body," and so as he keeps shifting barely a foot at a time along the face of the whitened wall, he goes on adding to the horrible list, while the ghastly fact dawns on you that every letter denotes a body cut down from the gallows, and that the pavement you are walking on is bedded in the remains of who shall say how many male and female murderers.? We are comparatively moderate in modern times in the use of the hempen cord as a remedy against man-slaying, but this was nearly a generation since, when business was exceedingly brisk in that line, and a hanging was looked for in the Old Bailey on a Monday almost as much as a matter of course as the cattle-market in Smithfield on a Friday. Then, as now, the dreadful little lane between the high walls was the only place of sepulchre for those who passed out to death through the Debtor's door. The very paving stones bear witness to the many times they have been roughly forced up by unskilled hands that a hole may be dug for the reception of the poor coffined wretches who wear quicklime for a shroud. There is not a whole paving-stone the length of the alley, and they are patched and cobbled and mended with dabs of mortar in the most unhandsome way.

"A very large number must have been buried here at one time and another," I remarked. "Bless you, yes sir," replied the Newgate warder of long service, "you can't half see the letters. They need to be all over the other wall as well, but, being whitened every year, the letters at last got filled up." It was not a pleasant idea, and I believe that the cracked and unstable condition of the paving stones suggested it, but it came into my mind as I scanned the walls and made out scores and scores of ancient letters, showing ghost-like through the obliterating whitewash, what a hideous crowd it would make if those to whom the initials applied

could all in a moment be recalled to life.' The narrow alley would not hold them all. There would ensue such a ferocious crushing and striving for escape that there would be murder done over again, and such work for Mr. Marwood that he would be striking for extra pay.

AT A NEWGATE FLOGGING.

THE hoar-frosted stones of Newgate never show to such grim advantage as on a dull, deadly cold morning, with the strong old prison enveloped in a leaden mist, that might pass as its natural breath, emitted from the several spiked jaws that are its portals. Such a morning was it when, apprised of the fact that a brace of brutal garotters were to be brought up for the lash, I presented my card at the door of Newgate. I had very nearly run against the common hangman, coming from the direction of Smithfield, with the brim of his hat pulled down to the level of his bleary eyes, and with a comforter enveloping his visage to the very nostrils of his clubby nose. Not that on account of his horrible profession Mr. Calcraft is shy of public recognition—not in the least. But, as before stated, the morning was raw cold, and our hangman is verging towards seventy years old. After all, I was not quite sure it was he; but, while I was wondering, he turned abruptly in at the first doorway from Newgate Street, where there was a servant of the prison cleaning the steps.

He turned about, and, recognising his friend, at once exclaimed—

"What, Ben, old chap, how are you?" and he dropped the scrubbing-brush to shake the hand that had slipped the fatal bolt a hundred times with as much cordiality as though he expected him, and was mighty glad to see him. Undoubtedly he was expected. He had come to work. Calcratt's profession has its branches, and flogging is reckoned amongst them. Flogging was the job that had brought him to Newgate this morning.

Not the adminstering of certain stripes with a birch rod to the backs of a batch of incorrigible little boys, but the application of the lash, the terrible "cat," to the sturdy shoulders of two most awful ruffians of the garotter breed. Since last May twelvemonths very many black sheep had been tried and

sentenced at the Old Bailey, yet in all that year and a half not one had appeared so desperately bad but the appalling, the excruciating cat-o'-nine-tails was deemed more than equal to his deserts. The fact is, the British public are not favourably disposed towards the lash, except in extreme cases.

Well, the cases in question were extreme. Ruffian Number One had assulted a lady in broad daylight—at three o'clock in the afternoon in fact—and, after partly strangling her, had seized her watch-chain, and tugged at it with such brutal determination, that his victim's throat was seriously lacerated. This promising young fellow, aged twenty-two, had been previously convicted, and his sentence was two years' hard labour and twenty-five lashes with the cat.

But his iniquity became almost trival when set beside that of which his brother garotter had been convicted. This scoundrel, named Regan, hailed from the "Mint," his hunting-ground being the Borough High Street and the awful courts that thread it. While in pursuit of his peculiar trade—the dark evenings had just set in, and doubtless Mr. Regan was vigorous and all alive for the business—a female confederate had entrapped a wayfarer into the mouth of an alley; and, while she was holding him in converse, Regan, the garotter, pounced on him, and in two seconds had his murderous thumbs on the man's windpipe. Somehow there was a struggle, and to make sure of his prey Mr. Regan flung him down on the stones, and to make surer still, kicked him about his defenceless head with his hobnailed boots. It wasn't of the least consequence to him where his iron-shod boot-sole alighted, so he kicked the poor wretch in the face as well, and knocked his eye out; thus when the wounded man was discovered the maltreated organ of sight was lying on the man's cheek. This was Regan; and he being, though only twenty-seven, an old, old offender, he was sentenced to seven years penal servitude, and, in addition, to thirty lashes with the cat at the hands of the common hangman.

It was quite an event at Newgate—an event that demands the presence of the Under Sheriff, at least, but, to his credit be it spoken, one of the Sheriffs, Mr. Bennett, was there as well, despite his considerable age, the early hour, and the inclemency of the weather. It was a grave business, and it

behoved every man in authority to be at his post. The governor was there, and several other gentlemen, and, more important than all, the doctor. Thirty lashes form an exceptionally severe flogging. Men have been known to die, in Russia, under an infliction of the knout; why not under the thong of the much-dreaded cat? Oh, yes, the doctor was there, and I have no doubt that if Messrs. Lilly and Regan could have peeped in at the governor's office and seen the solemn faces of the gentlemen assembled, each with his soul sickening against the dreadful thing that every tick of the clock brought him closer to witnessing, they would indeed have quaked in their cowardly shoes.

Ten o'clock, and the prisoners were waiting. Through grim passages and corridors and across the yard where the gallows is erected, and so into a bleak hall, bare of furniture except for a table and a form or two, and over against the whitewashed wall on the other side of the whipping apparatus—an odd-looking contrivance, with holes to clasp the wrists in, and secure hampering for the feet at the ankles. There, were the warders, and there was the executioner, and there, too, was one of the wretches whose yells would presently make the roof resound.

I was glad to learn that this was Regan; there was such an expression of terror in his villainous face. A brawny-shouldered, well-nurtured ruffian, with a bullet-head, and a chin deeper and broader than his forehead; a muscular young fellow, standing five feet eight or so. His shirt had been hung loosely over his back, and, as soon as the witnesses had settled in their places, he was revealed with his upper part bare, and the hangman led him to the whipping-post. He was in a mortal fright, but he said nothing: he only shivered while his bare back became what is known as "goose-flesh," and uttered a muffled snort, like that of a horse with his head in a nose-bag. It was coming close now! The only way to nerve myself to the task of keeping my eyes towards the back was to picture beast and bully Regan in the dark court, overhauling the pockets of the senseless man, bruised, and blinded of one of his precious eyes.

Then the executioner produces his cat-o'-nine-tails.

I think that everybody saw the terrible implement bu

Regan, and his eyes were closed in dreadful expectation. I was heartily glad that he did not see it. Had it been otherwise, I should not be surprised if in his ignorance of how much a little whip could make a back smart, he had turned his villainous gaze on it and laughed in the hangman's face. I don't recollect whether Mrs. Joe Gargery's "tickler," which was the terror of Pip's life, was minutely described in "Great Expectations;" but if it was nothing more formidable than this article, all I can say is that Pip was very easily scared. Judging from appearances, I would ask for nothing more than the handle of a hearthbrush, and a penn'orth of string of the thickness of a tobacco-pipe, and I would wager to produce that dreadful scourge's exact counterpart. The handle was about two feet in length, and the "tails" about fourteen inches. The hangman spat on his hand, and "swish!" Mr. Regan had tasted "cat."

He did not writhe or yell, or utter any agonised exclamation; but I was not in the least surprised, for really there was nothing to yell about. His back was marked—that is to say, you could see where the tails had struck the skin, marking it pinkish; but that was all. Swish again; but the hangman might as well have flogged a brick wall for any cry of pain that was elicited from the sturdy young garotter. Swish, swish, till ten more lashes had been administered, and then Mr. Regan was flogged out of his determination to "take it dumb," and he growled out "Oh!" If his punishment had been limited to ten lashes —no uncommon sentence—the culprit might afterwards have bragged to his comrades of his utter contempt of the Newgate cat. After the fourteenth or fifteenth, however, the punishment began to tell, and Regan cried "Whooo!" and "Ah!" but it was behind his clenched teeth, and in not at all a loud tone.

About the eighteenth lash he turned his face to the hangman, and said, in tones of reproach rather than entreaty, "Lay it on fair, will yer?" and then planted his forehead against the board to take the other twelve. When he had received them, from under his left shoulder-blade to the top of his right there was an ugly beer-coloured patch about six inches in width; but he was not made to bleed at all, and

when his limbs were released he needed no assistance in putting his shirt on. Reckoning from the moment Mr. Calcraft spat in his hand until now, exactly a minute and three-quarters had elapsed.

I will not so minutely particularise the flogging of the second man. He was by no means so ill-looking a ruffian as the first; he came up smiling, and pulled off his shirt as though about to engage in a bout of boxing, of the result of which he was tolerably confident. It was at once evident that he was a fellow of entirely different mettle from the garotter of the "Mint." He was not in such good condition and his skin was of more flimsy texture, and his ribs much more visible—such ribs as in the old brutal days of naval flogging the "cat" would have scratched bare with about three strokes of its claws. But three, four, five, and the young fellow did not halloo; he writhed and winced, but he uttered no sound that might be heard in any front room, the noise proceeding from the back. Like his predecessor, he begged of the hangman to "lay it on fair," and at every stroke he arched his back and twisted his head backwards with a sudden jerk, as though to look at the smarting place. He didn't yell, but he suffered so much more than Regan that the hangman's heart was touched, and he feelingly apologised for his share in the business.

"You know," exclaimed Calcraft, pausing between lashes fourteen and fifteen to utter the humane remonstrance, "you are hurting yourself much more than I am hurting you; you should keep still, and not wriggle about so."

After which friendly hint he cut at him again, and speedily brought the disgusting spectacle to an end.

It was the first time I had seen the lash applied to the back of a fellow creature. I hope never again to witness such a performance; but at the same time I am bound to say that it would have given me much more satisfaction if, at least in one case—that of Master Regan—I had been able to turn my back upon Newgate with more pity for the flogged, and less contempt for the flogger and his implement. I have no idea who prescribes the size, weight, and pain-inflicting properties of the Newgate "cat," or whether the judge who passes the awful sentence ever asks to see the instrument

with which it is to be carried out. If neither of their Lordships has done so yet, I would humbly advise them to make the inspection without delay. The very "cat," with which the ruffian Regan, and after him Lilly, were lashed might, without fear of shocking them, be laid before them, and that just as it was when its frightful work was done, since its every tail was clean and white, and as free from crimson stain as when the hangman brought it out of his cupboard.

I hope that I am not one who delights in the utmost rigour of the law; indeed, it is my opinion, that, as a rule, transgressors are too severely punished; but, at the same time, I have no hesitation in declaring that it would be a salutory amendment if the Newgate cat were made at least twice as formidable as it is at present. Undoubtedly it inflicts considerable pain—the discoloured backs and subdued moans and mouthings of the two men I had seen were sufficient proof of that; but more than this is needed. It is generally understood that the application of knotted thongs to the bare human back is productive of a spell of agony so intolerable that the mere threatening of it acts as a check against men of such devilish inclinations even as Regan. The law and the people tolerate the use of the dreadful cat-o'nine-tales only because they believe that the worst of criminals, such as garotters, are more afraid of it than of Portland slavery or solitary confinement; and, supposing the lash to be real and not make-believe, the conjecture is correct. It is a fact that Regan, with all his brute strength and barbarous recklessness, dreaded Saturday morning so much that several days before he pretended illness, and would have been content almost to live on physic for a time if he could have shirked the punishment which he had heard was so terrible. But can any one believe that the brute who could stamp on a fellow-creature's head for the sake of the few shillings in his pocket, was tormented through the day, and haunted through the night by imagining the sort of scourge that the hangman whipped him with? There can be no doubt that his horrified mind pictured an instrument many times more severe, and it is an injustice to those who rely on the law for protection that his tormenting bodings were not amply justified by the result.

It is to be hoped that the convict Regan will be the last

who will be able in truth to tell his comrades that the much dreaded lash—at Newgate at least—means nothing more than a whip of string which does not hurt more than a birch rod, wielded by a man whose arms have grown feeble with age, who commiserates those on whom it is his duty to carry out the law's just sentences, and who furnishes them with valuable hints against their hurting themselves more than in the tenderness of his heart he would.

It may be as well to state that immediately after the appearance of the above facts, in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, an inquiry was instituted, and the old unsatisfactory condition of things was at once amended. The next gang of garrotters sentenced to the lash found a very different reception than that given to Messrs. Regan and Co. In place of the feeble old hangman, there stood two stalwart young prison warders, and the "cat" was one that could scratch in real earnest.

A DAY WITH THE HOPPERS.

TRAVELLERS by early trains may see strange sights, and meet with strange company. As a rule it would be difficult to imagine a place so comfortless and dreary as a great railway station at an early hour in the morning. The dirt and litter of yesterday's traffic are not yet effaced from the platforms and waiting rooms; the dead and cold ashes lie in the yearning grates; hollow echoes attend the slamming of the great doors; the jaded and breakfastless aspect of the third-class passengers proves that they have been roused from bed hours before their customary time of rising, so as to avail themselves of Parliamentary fare; while the sleepy snappishness of inhospitable night clerks and porters attests their impatience to get off duty.

All these untoward elements combine to damp the spirit, and incline one to the opinion that it is possible to be too early a bird, whatever the quality and dimensions of the prospective first worm. It is not always, however, that the daily business of the railway commences so unpromisingly. Before now it has happened that the peaceful pilgrim in quest of the train that starts at 5.40 A.M. has been startled and amazed to find the company's premises besieged by a mob as hideous to contemplate as it would be dangerous to approach—a gaol-cropped dirty crew of foul-mouthed roughs, restrained from committing acts of outrage and violence there and then only by a significant display of staves on the part of a small army of policemen in attendance. These were the prize-fighting gangs at whose illegal doings railway directors used to connive; enabling the lawless ruffians to slip away down into the country, and "pull off their little mill" before the constable of the peaceful village they had honoured with their patronage had rubbed his sleepy eyes open. Since the decline of the P.R. this pretty exhibition has become rare; but there is one equally strange, though

not so repulsive, which may be seen at this season of the year almost any morning by the early passenger who takes train at London Bridge.

As the said passenger contemplated the motley assemblage squatting on the steps and on the path—anywhere till the station doors should be opened—his first impression doubtless would be not that "the beggars were coming to town," but that they were quitting it, pack and baggage, never to return. Else why do they carry with them their household gods, their pots and kettles, and articles of crockery? Why are they laden with those enormous bundles which are almost as large as beds? Why have they been at the pains this fine morning to carry with them their umbrellas, if they are merely jolly beggars out on a picnicing excursion, and intending to return at night? Being beggars—and what else can they be, weather-stained, ragged, and shoeless as nine-tenths of them are?—what on earth can they want with umbrellas? Yet every family group is possessed of an umbrella—a capacious whale-bone-ribbed gingham, gartered in the middle, and with a protuberance below the tie as stout as the calf of a man's leg. In some cases, where the members of a family are numerous, two umbrellas may be seen stacked with the rest of the luggage.

Where are they going? Whither is this ragged host bound? A civil porter solves the mystery. They are hop-pickers; and, the season having just commenced, they are proceeding to Maidstone and its neighbourhood to find remunerative work on the plantations there. The railway company expect this annual migration, and prepare for it. The "hoppers" are not in the least particular how they travel, so long as it doesn't cost them much. In the event of third-class carriage accommodation being scarce, they have no objection to cattle trucks. On these conditions the railway authorities are content to carry them for a little more than the "tonnage" rate at which they convey heavy goods. At a later hour in the day I also took passage to Maidstone, and before I slept, made myself acquainted with as much concerning hops and hoppers as here follows.

First, as to the garden. The gentleman to whose courtesy

I am indebted for my information revealed to me much that, however valuable to any one intending to start a plantation, would not be found particularly interesting to the ordinary reader. He entered into pathetic details as to the various diseases the hop is heir to, and explained that from few of them had the tender plant escaped this year.

I must confess that I was a little disappointed with the hop, having always regarded it as the type of sturdiness and strength—the noble flower that yields up its best blood in order that strong beer may be brewed, and the dignity and valour of the nation maintained. My friend informed me, on the contrary, that from the very hour of its birth, it is as uncertain as an ailing baby. You can never depend on it from one day to the next, or close your eyes on the pretty tendrils, winding about the poles, in the certainty of finding them hale and hearty on the morrow. Blight may assail them as suddenly as croup attacks an infant, and the morning's sun rise on their drooping heads and leaves sickening nigh to death. They are subject to worms. Tiny insects assail them, and turn them black as though they were plague-stricken. They have an awful time of it seemingly. The wonder as regards those I saw was, that after all, they were so good looking and fruitful. It seems that a crop may turn out bad this year, and that one raised from the same roots (which will live and bear for more than twenty years), may next season be all that can be desired. There are many qualities, and each has its distinctive name. There are "Goldens," and "Jones's," and "Grapes," and "Colgates." The first-named are most valuable, and are eagerly bought by the brewers of pale ale.

A Kentish hop-garden on a summer's afternoon is one of the most beautiful sights in the world. A succession of lovely avenues, walled on either side by the climbing bine that twines each about its separate pole—a stout stick as thick as a man's wrist—to a height of eight or nine feet, which is thickly covered with the honey-coloured flowers. The path between the rows, thrown into dense shade, are flecked and here and there broadly streaked with spears of bright sunlight that pierce the slighter foliage. A garden as yet untouched is a prettier sight than one undergoing the

process of picking. Both were before me; but I had come to see the pickers rather than the to-be-picked, and, crossing the road, was at once amongst the former.

Hop-picking is piece-work. In that brief sentence may be sought and found the reason why the father and mother hopper find it more advantageous to carry their numerous progeny with them than to leave them at home. It does not matter how small a child is—a blind or a crippled child might even earn a few pence in a hop garden. It is a very simple arrangement. The pickers do not perambulate the avenues basket in hand, and gather the fruit as currants or raspberries are gathered. It is all sitting-down work. The picking of a crop of hops involves the annihilation of the whole plantation. An assistant, called a "pole-puller," goes from plant to plant, and, after cutting off the vine close to the ground, pulls up the stick it clings to, and carries the lot boldly to the spot where the pickers are seated. The hops are picked into "bins"—enormous bags of canvas, the mouths of which are stretched on a frame-work of wood.

The flowers are not picked directly into the bin, however—it would be too high for the children to reach: here the mystery of the umbrellas was revealed. They were not intended to be used ferrule upwards and in the air, but ferrule downwards and stuck in the earth, with their whalebone ribs fully extended. Round this light and portable receptacle the smaller children squatted, while the elder ones selected for them the fattest bunches. A good sum of money may be earned by a man and his wife and half a dozen children, provided they are industrious. The price paid for the labour is not always the same; it depends on the crop. When the fruit is abundant the ruling price is "nine a shilling," which means a shilling for filling a measure capable of holding nine bushels. In lean seasons as high as sixpence a bushel is sometimes paid. Besides this, those who are industrious enough may make a little extra by collecting and saving the "blowers"—the weak and withered flowers that are weeded out from the rest. Such a family as I have mentioned will pick from eighty to ninety bushels of flowers in a long day. Very much, however, depends on the "measurer," who of course is the

master's man. The hop flower is peculiarly light, sixty bushels weighing no more than a hundredweight. When the measurer comes round he is, therefore, jealously watched by the picker lest his great hand should rest on the flowers in the bushel, and in a twinkling reduce a peck of them to the dimensions of a quart. The picker stipulates that the bushels shall be "filled loose," and likewise that the top of it shall be "struck" level with the woodwork, and not piled.

The fragrant flower as it is picked from the bine may not yet be "pocketed." In the first place, it is laden with such an amount of moisture as would speedily produce havoc in the bulk in the shape of mildew. Then again the choicest and healthiest of hops are not entirely free from insects, that would continue to feed on the flower after it is packed. The hops have, therefore, to be treated with sulphur. In his hurried journey by rail through the hop districts the reader must have observed certain conical erections, shaped somewhat like a brick kiln; this is where the hop flowers are dried and "cured."

A hop kiln is by no means a pleasant place to enter on a sultry summer afternoon; the heat is insupportable, the air is suffocating, the place is filled with sulphur fumes. The kiln has a grated floor, composed of a sort of lattice work. Over this is spread a hair cloth, and on the cloth the newly picked hops are heaped to the depth of a foot or more. Underneath the grating there is a pit in which is a fire and the sulphur pan. The choking fumes penetrate the hair cloth and saturate the flowers, which are carefully and methodically kept stirred by the kilnmen, who, with apparent unconcern, work in an atmosphere which would reduce a person of delicate organization to a condition of insensibility in a very few minutes. But the kilnman is an individual envied by one and all of the labourers in the hop vineyard. The work is by no means hard when one gets used to it, and the wages are good—six shillings a day, and on Saturday night a bottle of gin, out of which the drier may refresh himself on those rare occasions when he feels the brimstone "creeping over him."

Among other peculiarities that make hopping an occupation more attractive than any other kind of field-work,

is the certainty that whoever employs the hopper and his family will provide them with a lodging of some sort, and charge nothing for it. This constitutes one of the ugliest features of the hopping business.

Provided the weather is favourable, there is nothing objectionable in the occupation. It makes a charming picture; it is more healthful than gathering roses in a garden. But with the close of the day there is an end of the picturesque. The pickers, big and little, old and young, male and female, fall back into a state of existence that for indecency, not to say immorality, is scarcely to be equalled in the worst of the twopenny lodging-houses to which these poor wretches are compelled to resort when they are in London. Innocent people are apt to wonder how on earth a human creature can content himself or herself with the terribly scanty accommodation afforded by the casual ward of a workhouse; but there are worse places. The shed set apart for the sleeping places of the hundred or more hoppers on the plantation which I recently visited was more objectionable from every point of view.

Let the reader imagine an extensive barn with a floor of earth, and the sky visible through a thousand chinks in the roof-tiles. The only furniture of the place is a range of posts, with staples and bits of rope still dangling to them, showing that in the winter time the place is used for fattening cattle. Two partitions, rather more than knee high, extend across the interior of the building, and divide it into three compartments of about equal size. There is one bed in the place, composed of a heap of straw covered with a couple of sacks, and with a horse rug for a counterpane. It is spread on the earth, and is bordered round with hurdles, and over the bed, on a shelf slung to the wall, are a few articles of shabby crockery and a teapot. This is the sleeping chamber of the foreman of the pickers, but not one of his numerous hands aspires to such luxuries.

In each of the compartments above mentioned is strewn a litter of straw, certainly not more than six or eight inches deep, and at the complexion of which a costermonger's donkey would be justified in turning up his nose. This is all the accommodation afforded by the hop-grower for his

lodgers. The straw is meant for them to lie on, but for reasons of their own they prefer to sit on it, composing themselves for the night by huddling nose and knees together and squatting by the wall. This wall is of rough planking, and extending along its entire length are places rubbed bald of splinters, and greasily polished by the friction of their uneasy shoulders, showing that for many "seasons" the shed had been used as a dormitory. They never take off their clothes, these hop-pickers, except the more fastidious, who will divest themselves of their ragged coat or jacket, with which to make a cushion to sit upon. Sometimes a mother may divest herself of her shawl or gown to make a nest on the ground for her baby. The only rule in support of decency—and the married element is generally sufficiently strong to enforce it—is that the married couples sleep in the middle, and the single lads and lasses at the ends.

The foreman picker had not retired, though it was late, and when he obligingly opened the barn door, so that I might get a peep inside, the scene, though ugly, was peaceful enough. Every one was asleep, or pretending to be asleep, and the heavy and by no means sweet air was stirred by the nasal trumpeting of many who had earned sweet repose by twelve or fourteen hours' labour in the broiling sun. But one could not help suspecting that what now appeared was not the worst of it. Was it reasonable to expect decent behaviour among human creatures housed with so much less ceremony than pigs in a sty? And then it was impossible to avoid the reflection that the majority of these hop-pickers were dissolute, lawless tramps, for whom a prison has no terrors except the hard labour, and brazen, shameless women, who, lost to all sense of modesty, delight in nothing so much as mocking it in others. The majority of professional hop-pickers are undoubtedly of this class; but only the majority. Every season scores of decent men and women, just then "hard up," are tempted by the stories of four or five shillings a day, and join the troop that flock to the Kentish plantations. These, of course, must herd with the rest.

"Do you ever have any trouble with them?" I asked of the foreman.

"Nothing worse than larking," he replied, "and that mostly on a Sunday. They are so tired that they are glad to get to sleep on week days."

Nothing worse than larking. To be sure that foreman picker may have been a man whose sense of propriety was so severe that he would construe the most innocent funny remark or practical joke as a "lark." On the other hand, it would not be the least surprising if, in the event of an officer of the Society for the Suppression of Vice putting his head in at one of these dens some fine Sunday night when the hilarity is at its height, he would discover something that called pretty loudly for his interference.

LONDON COURTS AND ALLEYS.

May I be permitted to offer to gentlemen of an inventive turn of mind a suggestion as to the production of a mechanical contrivance that shall confer greater benefits on mankind than the steam-engine or the electric telegraph, and earn for the inventor fame and wealth at least equal to those which rewarded the genius and perseverance of Watt and Stephenson? I have not the remotest idea as to what should be the shape of this wonderful machine, or of what material it should be constructed, but its name should be the Plague Preventive and Fever Indicator. The mechanism would need to be so delicate that wholesome air would have no effect on it; but as soon as the atmosphere became tainted with pestilence, it should proclaim the fact with a noise compared with which the din of an ordinary railway whistle is a mellow tinkling. Moreover, the machine to be perfect should be uncompromising—not to be quieted with apologies or promises. It must insist that the evil it is exposing be at once remedied; indeed, it should be out of his power to leave off shrieking until the cause of complaint was completely eradicated.

I only stipulate for one thing—that I may be out of town on the morning when this ingenious machine is set agoing. Otherwise it would be simply impossible to escape from the deafening uproar. Supposing Parliament to be sitting at the time, gentlemen of the House of Commons would be unable to hear each other speak, for Peter Street lies within a bowshot of the legislative temple. Now Peter Street is full of filthy chinks that swarm with human life in a manner suggestive of nothing so much as a rotten old cheese. The judges at Westminster would be in the same predicament. There is not a law court, civil or criminal, that would be able to keep out the appalling sound. It is a fact, that notwithstanding all that has been done in the way of bettering the dwellings of the poor of the metropolis, and despite our vaunt that

London is the healthiest city in the world, its courts and alleys—east, west, north, and south—may still be reckoned in thousands; the majority of them being unfit for human residence, and not a few in such a condition that many people would not believe in a fairly-written description of them There is evidence—volumes of it—that London in a sanitary sense, is steadily improving. The first vigorous steps were taken about a quarter of a century since; and during the past five-and-twenty years, not a week, not a day has been lost in the highly-important work of making London a city fit to live in. Yet it is a simple fact that within three miles of Saint Paul's there may be found at least a thousand dens of squalor that are a shame and disgrace to any civilised nation.

The other day an offender was brought before one of the City Aldermen, charged with offering for sale some fruit that was somewhat decayed. His worship was justly indignant; but the terms in which he expressed himself were painfully significant of the fact that in spite of the advantage of his official position, he little knew what a tiny mite of the city's rottenness that half-bushel of plums or peaches represented. "Good heavens!" the worthy magistrate exclaimed, with a voice tremulous with emotion, "do you know what might have been the result had this fruit been eaten? We should have had cholera amongst us."

My dear Alderman, it is a mercy for which to offer up thanks in all our city churches, that the plague in question is not so easily evoked. People live on garbage such as that in the bushel basket; and the sickening odour that compels your nose to seek refuge in your pocket-handkerchief is the daily breath of their existence. Farringdon Market is not many minutes' walk from the Mansion House; and it might be wagered with a certainty of winning, that this sultry September afternoon there may be found at least a score of half-naked, dirty little children routing over the scavenger's swept-up heaps, exactly after the manner of pigs or ducks, gobbling up plums decayed out of all shape, rotten apples, oranges turned blue and with quite a hairy hide of mildew upon them—anything. Is this true? I seriously assure you that it is, and that it may be witnessed in Covent Garden or

Farringdon Market on any summer's day. But at last there is some hope that this shocking condition of things as regards the juvenile market prowlers will eventually be mended. There cannot be more than six or seven hundred of them, and after some weeks of skilful manœuvring the active officers of the School Board have captured almost a dozen of them.

But as regards the courts and alleys. For humanity's sake, it would be well, were it possible, to cut away a good sized block out of an acre of fair average of London squalor, and carry it out somewhere into Hyde Park, say, where it might be safely and conveniently exhibited. There is a broad field for selection. In the south, between London Bridge and the "Elephant and Castle," to the right is the Mint, with its awful colony of Irish; and to the left is Kent Street, with its network of slums, that give harborage to as many individuals "known to the police" as Newgate would hold, even if they were packed as close as barrelled herrings. Or you might take the Surrey side of Blackfriars Bridge, and cut your block out somewhere about Windmill Street, in the New Cut, or from the neighbourhood of Vauxhall, where the potteries and gasworks are. In the east you might take your pick from a hundred examples; but I should recommend a neighbourhood between Rosemary Lane and Limehouse Hole. In the north a remarkably choice sample—a rich, full-flavoured specimen—of ally life may be met with between the Philharmonic Hall and Islington Green. If you went westward, the choice might lie between Peter Street and Parker Street, in Drury Lane.

But it would be fairest, perhaps, to take a slice out of the centre of the city. It is rotten to the very core. You may stand on Holborn Viaduct and bawl loud enough for the inhabitants of the very filthiest spot in London to hear. It lies between the magnificent new meat market built lately by the Lord Mayor and the Corporation, and the great, gloomy Sessions House, that squats on what is funnily called the "Green" at Clerkenwell. The block I allude to is bounded on one side by Turnmill Street and on the other by Red Lion Street; and how it has escaped the vigilant eyes of the Sanitary Commissioners and their large staff of officers, who are, and have been for the last five and twenty

years, constantly on the look-out for this kind of thing, is a puzzle to me.

To be sure, the Sessions House, in which the judges have so often publicly expressed their opinion that half the vice and immorality existing among the lower classes is due to their herding together in pent-up slums, overshadows the place in question, and thus they may, in the semi-darkness, have missed it; but surely they might have smelt it—it stinks aloud. If that square half acre including Broad Yard, and Bit Alley, and Fryingpan Alley, could be taken up, just exactly as it is, without so much as disturbing a donkey stabled in a kitchen, or a gutter with a baby playing in it, and transported to Hyde Park—it might be railed in so that none of the creatures could escape, and a deep trench filled with some pleasant disinfectant might surround it—I venture to predict that it would prove an exhibition that would attract more visitors than did the first palace of glass and iron.

Mind you, there must be nothing artificial or sham about it. Everything must go on just as it did in Turnmill Street—just as it has been going on during the memory of the oldest inhabitant—just as it is going on *now*. I would not even take down the board from over the two-feet wide entry of Bit Alley, on which is inscribed the particulars of houses to let, and the notice that applications are to be made to the owner, a gentleman who resides far away in some charming rural spot in the country.

As guide and expositor at this amazing exhibition of the wild tribes of Turnmill Street, I would engage the worthy missionary, Mr. William Catlin, who would have stranger stories to tell of those among whom he has laboured so long and so faithfully than had a namesake of his, who, years ago, published the narrative of his experiences among the North American Indians. I have explored these dangerous regions with the gentleman in question. In his safe company—for they recognise in him a true friend, and never dream of molesting him—I have penetrated the fastnesses of Little Hell—so Broad Yard is called—and I have trod with him the dark places of Fryingpan Alley, where, excepting his own, and that of the policeman, the face of a white man is never

seen, the natives being at best of a greyish-slate colour. There was some stir at that time, now nearly four years ago. I found that, for the use of about a hundred and fifty inhabitants of the alley, there was but one water-closet, which was in a horrible condition. And it would have been infinitely worse, had not some needy old soul occasionally laboured there with a mop and pail, her reward being a few cinders, bestowed on her by the grateful residents, wherewith to make her a fire. Some hasty improvement was, I believe, made in this department. Then the water supply was acknowledged to be defective, and a peremptory requisition was made on the owner of the houses to fix up a capacious cistern, and he complied; but I may mention that several months afterwards no water had as yet been laid on, and that the said cistern served as a secluded roost for the ragamuffins who were bold enough to climb up into it.

I could not promise that the misused water-tanks should form part of my Hyde Park Exhibition. Still there would be no lack of other novelties and curiosities such as would fill a crowd of fashionable visitors with awe and amazement. They could have a fair opportunity, for instance, of being enlightened as to the simple way in which cholera is propagated in these regions, the marvel being that, under the circumstances, that baleful disease is not at this moment raging through the length and breadth of the City; for, permit me to repeat, that the courts and alleys of Turnmill Street are only a few of a thousand, and that in their main peculiarities they more closely resemble each other than members of a family. Green-stuff—cabbage, greens, turnip-tops, &c.—are the media through which death and devasta- are conveyed into many innocent and unsuspecting families.

Scores of costermongers inhabit the alleys of Turnmill Street. On hot summer nights you can see the poor tired fellows reclining on their barrow-boards, seeking that necessary repose that is not invariably to be found on an aged bedstead, with frowsy hangings, located in a little room in which, summer and winter, a fire to cook by is kept burning. The costermonger's best chance of making a penny is when there is a glut of greenstuff in the market and a few waggon-loads are left over, which, at last, are sold for what

they will fetch, as they rapidly grow stale and discoloured. It is then that the industrious barrow-man loads up (on the Friday, maybe) and conveys his bargain home. It is bestowed in the stable, or in the cellar, till next morning.

But now the greens are green no longer; the outer leaves look about as succulent as whitey-brown paper, and they are limp to their very hearts. They must be revived. This is only to be done by means of water, and, as may be easily understood, when ten or a dozen costermongers have each a barrow-load of greenstuff to "'liven up," it comes rather hard on the cistern. But they are economical with the precious liquid to a horrible degree. They make no secret of the operation. Standing in Turnmill Street any Saturday morning in the season, you may look in at the mouths of the alleys, and there see the washing-tubs in which the cabbages are in soak, while the slimy leaves of the "waste trimmings," accumulate on the slushy cobble-stones where the babies play. You may see all this, and you may smell the dreadful liquid in the tubs. You may see it rolling down the kennel, sluggish as weak treacle. Out of this ingenious industry, is evolved those wonderfully bountiful "penn'orths" of cabbage, for which, in the flare of gas and marketing hubbub, poor mothers, with large families, seek so eagerly, in order to eke out the scrap of meat that constitutes the staple of Sunday's dinner.

I should expect, if my projected Exhibition ever took place, that the aristocratic Belgravian visitors to it would take peculiar interest in the "'livening up" of cabbage plants. What could not be seen by looking in at the jaws of Little Hell, and the rest of Turnmill Street alleys, the good missionary before spoken of should describe to his noble and horrified patrons. He would tell them of a condition of affairs so horrible, that to exaggerate them would be almost impossible. Of men and women, and children by the dozen, herding in these crippled old houses, so snugly shut out from the highway—houses, the kitchen floor of which rot in stagnant pools, and are even too bad for the occupation of the by-no-means particular little Hellites, and the roofs of which are so shattered and broken, that when it rains every available scrap of crockery, with tubs, and pots, and kettles, have to

be spread about the floor to catch the descending downpour. Houses, the stairs of which are full of ragged splintery holes, that must be bad for little shoeless feet, and which have a dangling rope to assist the ascent, the legitimate handrail having been larcenously appropriated for firewood, long ago.

The painstaking missionary would also tell the sigh seers at the Hyde Park Exhibition of the Wild Tribes of Turnmill Street, of poor wretches who are too proud to beg or to go into the workhouse, and who every day of their lives set out to pick up their daily bread—cast out crusts, bones with scraps of meat on them—*literally out of the kennel*, and who retire at night to sleep on filthy rags and shavings. Of little children who never come out to play for months together, because they have no rags to cover them, and who amuse themselves within doors, naked as young Kaffirs—a tribe they not a little resemble, both as regards colour and the fashion of wearing their hair.

There are sweeps living in the alleys in the parlours of the houses; and there the bed is made and the food is cooked, all among the fat, full bags of soot; for the notion of ever washing herself or her inky progeny appears to Mrs. Sweep a better joke than attempting to scrub a blackamoor white. The good missionary could also tell of families living within his sphere of action, who keep the wolf from the door with cat's meat skewers, cutting them and pointing them for a half-penny a gross, and finding their own timber; of the blind and paralytic, and many who in the cold winter-time, lying ill and helpless on their dreadful beds, would starve outright did not charitable crumbs fall to them somehow: something more besides crumbs, too—a little money for rent, or they would speedily find themselves put out into the street. "No credit" is the inexorable motto of Mr. Rent Collector in these crazy abodes of dirt and squalor.

Nor must it be supposed that the lodgings are cheap. On the contrary, they are villainously dear. I use the word villainously advisedly, because of the abominably cruel way in which high rents are screwed out of these poor lodgers. They cannot help themselves. They are of a class that wouldn't be accepted anywhere else but in a slum; for the ways of slumming suit their ignorance, their disinclination

to be clean, and the bare-faced shifts they are often reduced to, to make a living. The owners of these piggeries that go by the name of human habitations, are well aware of this; and they know, too, that lamentably plentiful as slums are, they are not a bit more so than the demand for them. They are choice resorts, in fact, and those who effect them must pay for them.

It is no exaggeration to say that many of these horrible houses realize more rent than do tenements of a like size in a fashionable London square. It is one of the safest investments in the world for a heartless speculator. He is all right as long as he can stave off the sanitary inspector, and those who regard it as their duty to call public attention to his mean selfishness, and demand that for health and decency sake, he should no longer be allowed to fatten on vice and disease and dirt. His tenants will stick to him. Their great dread is that, despite the heavy rent they pay, he will turn them out; and then what is to become of them? Slums are dotted only here and there, and they are generally "full," and it may easily enough happen that the costermonger ejected from Turnmill Street may have to travel—with his family and donkey and barrow—as far as Stepney, say, before he is able to find any one who will take him in; and then he will have to pay as much and perhaps a little more than he did in Little Hell.

THIEF-PRESERVES.

To say the least of it, there seems an anomaly that, while every precaution which a wholesome regard for the safety of person and property can suggest is adopted to keep in check the malpractices of thieves and ruffians, we permit them to herd together, and make no objection to their appropriating certain streets and places, where, undisturbed, they may enjoy the fruits of their infamous industry, and hold council, fearless of the ear of honesty regarding future depredations. Possibly the system has never been candidly advocated or openly defended when it has been attacked, but taking facts as we find them, it is fair to assume it is one to which the police authorities are not averse. Nowhere is it better known than at Scotland Yard that these breeding and abiding places for the dangerous classes exist. No quarter of the great metropolis is free from them. The West End has its great ruffian nests almost under the shadows of the Houses of Parliament; within a stone's cast of the "Angel" at Islington, in the north, the collection of a crowd is the signal for scores of thieves of the worst stamp to appear on the scene as if by magic. In the south of London as many professional depredators as would fill Horsemonger-Lane Goal might be caught at a single cast of the net in and about the New Cut; whilst London-in-the-East might, if it felt so disposed, produce at a single day's notice a greater number of blackguards of the pure, home-bred kind than all the rest of the metropolis combined.

Place in the hands of a police-inspector of any experience a map of London, and in five minutes, with a lead pencil, he will be able to "spot" every thieves' quarter within a circuit of three miles of St. Paul's—and a hideously blotched affair that map would be when he had done with it. It has been urged that is a convenient system: that since there always must be rogues and robbers amongst us, it is

an advantage to keep them separate from honest folk; and that, what perhaps is of scarcely less importance, it simplifies the duties of a policeman. He can make tolerably sure if a street robbery is committed say in Southwark, that he will find the individual "wanted," if not in Mint Street in Kent street. At all events, it does not take very long to investigate the localities mentioned, and in both the robber is well known. It is of no use casting about for him in that neighbourhood. He is away from home—off into the country, probably, until the hunt cools a little. When he returns—as return he must to his old haunts and his old associates, or how is he to earn a living?—the police will hear of it within a very few hours, and if it be still desirable he can then be captured. In simpler cases, where the culprit depends on his luck in avoiding identity, the police commonly lay hands on the offender at his accustomed haunt almost before he has regained his breath after running off with the plunder.

There is, of course, an advantage to the public in this, and from such a limited view of the matter to encourage the domiciling of all the thieves of a district in one particular street is thief-catching made easy. But, on the other hand, it is gravely questionable whether it is not an advantage bought at too high a price. There is comfort in community, and considerable encouragement to continue in the paths of evil if every one perambulating the same promenade is hail fellow, well met. Whether a man be honest or a thief, his first purpose is to provide for himself an agreeable maintenance and genial relaxation, when the labour of the day is at an end; and these advantages are secured to the professional depredator when he is permitted to house and neighbour with those of his own calling, and to enjoy family gatherings and pleasant evenings, when business as well as pleasure may be freely discussed. Besides this, children are born in "thieves' quarters" as in all others, and how a child can fail to become a thief when it is shamelessly reared amongst thieves is not easy to understand.

Take one particular example of these thief-preserves. Within a short distance—certainly not more than a thousand yards—of the heart and centre of the City of London there has existed for the past fifty years, and still exists and

flourishes, what is perhaps the foulest and most dangerous street in the whole metropolis. When one reads occasionally of unfortunate travellers waylaid and robbed, or captured and held to ransom by Italian brigands in their native mountain fastnesses, with pity for the victim is mingled not a little indignation that the constituted authority should not be able and willing to put an end to a state of things so scandalous. Flower and Dean Street is not a mountain pass, neither is it situated in a wild and isolated part of the country. It is within a stone's cast of Spitalfields parish church. It opens out of a broad thoroughfare, and one that from early morning until late at night is alive with vehicular and pedestrian traffic; Commercial Street—that is its name—is, in fact, the main highway between Bishopgate Street and Whitechapel. Yet, from the Commercial Street front to the Brick Lane rear, and taking, say, at this spot a square quarter of a mile, may be found as appalling a stronghold of ruffianism and vice as ever disgraced civilisation.

It is not Flower and Dean Street alone. There are Thrawl Street and Great and Little Keat Street, and others. all netted together in a tangle of alleys and courts of the worst kind.

But the ugliest street of all is Flower and Dean Street. It is notorious in the neighbourhood that even in broad daylight it would be long odds against the rash wayfarer who exposed his watchchain in this delectable street escaping unmolested. It is not a street of merely a few houses. It takes a couple of minutes to walk through it at a brisk pace, and from top to bottom, and on both sides, it gives asylum to notoriously bad characters. Its pathway is narrow and dilapidated, its cobbled road-way miry and pestilent. This much, however, must be said in its favour. It makes no pretence to be other than it is. It does not hypocritically put on a false front of decency in order to lure the unsuspicious stranger. The tall old black houses on either side are as utterly wrecked and abandoned-looking as its worst class of inhabitants. The house doors—knockerless, paintless, and battered on their lower panels with visitations of hobnailed boots—stand ajar, or, if shut, may be easily opened by pulling the string that dangles outside, and which

is connected with an interior latch. A peep into the passage discloses boards rotten and mud-coloured, and with splintery gaps that would be bad at night time for unwary feet. Besides this may be seen the dilapidated staircase that leads to the upper regions with, perhaps, a glimpse of the dreadful "yard" with its sights and smells unspeakable.

The residents of Flower and Dean Street do not invite the scrutiny of the passer-by as regards their domestic economy. As a rule, the parlour windows are boarded up, and the windows are smeared on the inside with some colouring matter that makes them impenetrable to daylight. The first idea is that such dreadful-looking places must be uninhabited—that this is a neglected and fast-decaying collection of edifices on which the district surveyor has set his seal as being unfit for human habitation. And, in truth, in the day time there is no great amount of life or activity apparent in the place. Here and there may perhaps be seen, thrust out at an upper casement, a closely-cropped head, backed with a liberal display of naked shoulders and tattered shirt, or the upper half of a dreadful-looking female, her hair still uproarious from last night's orgie at the "Fryingpan" (the title of the public house at the corner of the next street).

But he who would see Flower and Dean Street in its true colours must view it at night. In its true colours emphatically the houses, being strangely variegated in hue, and looking particularly hideous on that account, in the fitful blink of the lodging-house lamps. The majority of the dwellings are lodgings, and there are "red" houses and "blue" houses, and "yellow," so called and known by those who patronise them. A colour is easier to remember than a number, and perhaps one is less likely to make mistakes if driven to seek hasty sanctuary. The lodging-houses are all duly "registered" The fact is in all cases announced on a boardnailed above the doorway, no matter how dilapidated and foridding-looking the domicile may be. The circumstance of a lodging-house being registered "according to Act of Parliament" is supposed to be a guarantee that its bedrooms are light, airy, and not overcrowded. Such pleasant conditions may be obtainable in Flower and Dean

Street, where a single bed is to be had for fourpence or a "double" for sevenpence, but the suggestion appears more like a grim joke than sober reality. Perhaps, however the dormitories are not so crowded as they otherwise would be because of the lodgers following nocturnal pursuits which engage them until the frustrating dawn. But they do not all set out "to work" at dusk of evening. If they do, a great number find easy jobs and are home early. From eight to nine o'clock until past midnight the hideous narrow thoroughfare is all alive and alert with men and lads and women and girls, seeking whom they may devour—all excepting those who have recently devoured somebody and are now hilarious from having washed down the meal with strong waters.

"DEPUTY" AT PUGMASTER'S.

PUGMASTER'S Lodging House is one of a row that skulks in a blind alley between Bishopsgate Street and Whitechapel. There used to be a double row in the alley; but a few years since Metropolitan Improvements assaulted the shameful "no thoroughfare" with a vigour that threatened the entire annihilation of Pugmaster and all his crew. Having succeeded in demolishing one side of the way, Metropolitan Improvement faltered in its virtuous intention, let the cleared site on a building lease, backed out of the alley with its implements of demolition, and has not been heard of since. The building erected on the reclaimed ground is a metal warehouse—a store on an extensive scale for all manner of castings in brass and copper of a handy and portable description. It is well known that "metal" of all kinds has an irresistible attraction for thieves and vagabonds of the type common to Pugmaster's Alley. A few pounds' weight of it are easily stowed away, and, as a rule, there are difficulties in identifying it.

Then, again, whatever may be its character or quality, it is "worth its weight;" and, despite all laws and Acts of Parliament to the contrary, any quantity of it, from half a pound to half a hundredweight, may be turned into ready money in the twinkling of a marine-store dealer's scale-beam. The metal warehouse stands with its back to the alley; and the only outlet or look-out into it from the blank brick wall is a sort of half-door, half-window, at which, occasionally, goods are delivered. It is an ordinary window, secured—as may plainly be seen from the outside—only with an ordinary catch. The opening is not more than eight feet from the ground, and it might safely be wagered that any night there might be found in Pugmaster's Alley twenty active young fellows both able and willing to make

an entry by that window in as little time as it takes to count ten. Nor is it any secret to that twenty—nay, to the fifty times twenty that nightly find harbourage in the alley, one and all of whom are afflicted with a hankering after metal—that, entrance to the warehouse once gained, the plunder of valves, taps, hinges and fine compact, weighty caps for axletrees, would be almost inexhaustible. Yet for six years has that metal warehouse remained as safe from molestation as though a troop of soldiery, similar to that which guards the Bank of England, nightly passed its threshold.

Why was this? I put the question to the person I deemed best able to answer; and he responded with a grin and a chuckle that seemed to make even his wooden leg quiver. We were in the warehouse in which was the window overlooking Pugmaster's Alley. Peering cautiously to make sure that he was not overheard, he replied:

"It's the rummiest thing you ever heard tell of. I don't know who put the rumour about, but I'll swear I didn't. They've got hold of it somehow that I sleeps on a bench under this winder, and that I never lays down without having my poleaxe just handy, and that I have swore a oath to chop down the first one that tries at that winder. I've swore to give 'em no warning, but to wait till whichever of 'em it is raises the sash and puts in his head and shoulders, to chop him down like a bullock."

This was Giles, the sole after-dark resident and custodian of the warehouse—a sinister-looking, broad-shouldered, squat-built old gentleman, who had seen much naval service in his earlier days, and who, though he has enjoyed a pension for at least twenty years past, is still as tough as rhinoceros hide.

"Then there is no truth in the rumour?" said I; but at that moment there appeared in the passage of Pugmaster's lodging house—it was not more than half a dozen yards across the alley, and our window was open—a villainous figure of a man with soldering-irons sticking out of the pocket of his greasy, ragged jacket, as though to give colour to his pretence of being a brasier. Mr. Giles nudged me, and looking another way, remarked solemnly, as though in continuation of our conversation—

"I'd split his skull just like a sheep's head is split, if I had to stand my trial for it."

I was quite aware that the remark was intended for the edification of the brazier, but if he heard it, it had no great effect on him. He merely scowled and snorted; but that may have been his ordinary morning salutation to a world that could not appreciate his honest efforts.

This same old Giles the watchman had first excited my curiosity respecting Pugmaster's. The street-door of Pugmaster's was never shut. It was the only means of lighting the dingy kitchen at the end of the passage by day, and at night it stood wide open for the accommodation of lodgers. It was held back by a large stone, the face of which was rubbed smooth and polished by the friction of trousers' legs and of female skirts. On this stone did Pugmaster's Deputy sit of evenings before the press of business began, and smoke his short pipe, and talk with Mr. Giles, who after the warehouse was closed, frequently sat at the window and smoked *his* pipe.

Sometimes the watchman would so far unbend as to read the murders out of the weekly newspaper to the attentive young man sitting on the stone in the opposite passage, and who I really believe, setting aside the poleaxe, entertained great respect and admiration for Mr. Giles. "Any time when you would like to go over Pugmaster's, say the word, sir, and I'll go with you," Mr. Giles, on more than one occasion, had been good enough to remark; and on the day I called on him, prepared to take him at his word, I found him quite ready.

We discovered the "Deputy"—a slim young man, of not prepossessing appearance—taking his breakfast in the kitchen. He was airily attired in a very dirty shirt and a pair of greasy black trousers, secured at the waist with a leather strap, and worn without braces. His hair was long and lank, and so bountifully oiled as to defeat the young man's intention to "curl it under," after the approved "Newgate knocker" fashion; but he had not washed his face, and his hands were almost as grimy as his turned-back shirt-sleeves. He was luxuriating in a breakfast, the chief ingredients of which were toast—which he spread with

dripping contained in a gallipot—and red herrings. He had an abundant supply of smoking hot coffee in a vessel of zinc with a wooden handle, like a washing bowl. His greeting was affable, though somewhat striking in its terms.

"Morning, Mr.—— Giles," said he. "'Ow do you find yourself this mornin', sir?"

I expected to see my friend resent the sanguinary imputation; but since he merely made cheery response that he was "bobbish," I set it down in my own mind that Mr. Giles accepted the ugly prefix to his name as referring rather to the mystic poleaxe than to himself.

"We think of going over the house, if you've got no objection," said Mr. Giles.

"You're welcome. We're registered, don't you know?" replied the Deputy, with a glance in my direction.

But Mr. Giles whispered him, and at once set his mind at ease. Too much so, because he made himself suddenly and demonstratively friendly.

"'Ow are yer?" said he; and before I could object, he caught my hand in the dirty paw with which he had just spread a round of toast, and shook it as though he had known me for years.

"You was pretty full last night," remarked Mr. Giles; "I see 'em comin' in pretty thick after twelve."

"I didn't see no light in your winder."

"That says nothing," returned Mr. Giles, vaguely hinting poleaxe. "I lays awake hours in the dark sometimes, with my eye at that there bottom pane. Anybody at home?"

"On'y the Bedrid," replied the Deputy.

"'Course; he's always at home," responded Mr. Giles, lightly; "it would be rather a mirricle to catch him out."

"You won't 'ave a drop of coffee?" asked the hospitable Deputy, holding the washing bowl towards us with a persuasive smile; "it's werry good."

But Mr. Giles had recently breakfasted, and I don't care much for coffee myself; so we started at once for upstairs.

"We has women as well as men," said the Deputy, when we reached the first landing of what hundreds of years ago had been a handsome roomy mansion; "but we're werry strict. Lor' bless you, they know better than to carry on

here. We floors 'em out; and a male ketched coming down, or a female ketched going up, after they've been quartered, gets their travelling ticket, whatever the hour might be."

All this, rendered into English by Mr. Giles, meant that males and females seeking lodgings at Pugmaster's were lodged on separate floors, and that any attempt to evade the decent rule was punished by instant expulsion from the premises.

The first floor, which was devoted to married couples, was the first we entered. I am not thoroughly acquainted with the Lodging-House Act, but I believe one of its provisions is that there shall be no more than one bed and bedstead in each room set apart for the use of the married, and that each room shall afford a certain quantity of pure air adjudged to be sufficient for healthful respiration. I don't say that this salutary law was absolutely set at defiance at Pugmaster's, but most decidedly Pugmaster had ventured as near the edge, of infractian as he possibly could without toppling over. The apartment was about forty feet long and twenty wide; and the whole space was divided into strips, each barely large enough to contain a bedstead, the partitioning being a mere flimsy screen of half-inch deal not more than seven feet high, with a gap at bottom between it and the floor wide enough for any human creature of moderate bulk to crawl through, I pointed this out to the Deputy, and his reply was "That, that was 'ow it was registered."

"And how about the air?" said I.

"What air?" returned the Deputy.

"As to the quantity; you are particular on that score, of course?"

"Get out," said Mr. Deputy, grinning? "what the 'ell's their hair to do with us?"

Then, a light suddenly dawning on him, he continued,

"Oh, the rigistered air, you mean. Oh, it's all right enough: there's nothink here but wot's rigistered."

"But it doesn't seem to me that there can be sufficient air in this place for so many lodgers, when the beds are full."

"Ay, but look on the quality on it," returned the Deputy, pointing to an open window that overlooked a wretched tree,

naked and in the last stage of consumption; and as he spoke he inhaled a heavy mouthful, and slapped his chest as though he liked the flavour, admired it for its density, and regarded it as a sort of over-proof spirit that might be diluted tremendously and still retain strength enough for ordinary purposes.

"We charges a tanner a pair—for married 'uns, that is," said Mr. Deputy, "and fourpence for single 'uns."

"But suppose a married couple have children?"

"Then they pays for 'em, of course. Dash it all!" said the Deputy, "the omblibusts does that."

"But little children—mere infants I allude to."

"They all counts," returned Deputy; "they ain't got no call to bring 'em to 'blige us; *we* don't want 'em."

I inquired of Deputy if the bedsteads were always in the state in which they now appeared—with a thick coating of grease and dirt all over the head-board—and if what I saw was about the average cleanliness of the sheets; to which he replied, with much satisfaction, that what I saw was the average condition of things "as nigh as a toucher," and that everything was duly "rigistered."

When I entered the married folks' dormitory, I looked anxiously about me for a personage whose existence had been but vaguely hinted by Mr. Deputy at the commencement of our interview, when he spoke of "only the Bedrid." We had by this time ascended the next flight of stairs, and I was about to ask further concerning the mysterious Bedrid, when Deputy opened a door, and the same time gave me a clue. In size the apartment was similar to the one below, but there were no partitions, and a long range of bedsteads, each about the width of an ordinary hearthrug, extended the length on the side-walls. I don't think the windows had been opened as yet, and the air of the place was misty having in it, among other things, a flavour of rum. In a few moments my eyes grew used to the mist, and then I could make out that one of the bedsteads in a distant corner was occupied. There was an upraised arm, a hand grasping a bottle, and making with it signs of beckoning. Mr. Deputy hurried forward and we followed.

"'Ow are yer, old cock?" the Deputy inquired, cordially; to which the "old cock"—of whom nothing was visible but

the arm and hand, the bottle, a green woollen nightcap, and a pair of bloodshot eyes peering over the edge of the frowsy coverlet—replied hoarsely that he was "on the werge of sinking, and would the Deputy be good enough to procure him a quarten of rum."

"Why, 'tain't time," said the Deputy, cheerily; "its bare eleven by the church clock."

"The church clock's a liar," returned the fierce old cock, uncovering his hideous unshaven muzzle to give more distinct utterance to the accusation: "you go and do what you're asked; that's a good lad."

Then for the first time observing Mr. Giles and myself, he looked scared, and mutely appealed to the Deputy for explanation. Being assured that it was all right, his apprehensions subsided. After a few moments' reflection, he thrust under the bed-clothes the hand that had just grasped the rum-bottle, and, after a little delay, hauled up what evidently was the end of a trouser brace—"in case of fire," he whispered, hoarsely, at the same time wagging his ugly head vigorously in support of his assertion. "It 'ud be a horful thing to be burned in the bed, so I sleeps in 'em." On which Mr. Giles winked at the Deputy, who gravely chafed his nose with the rum-bottle; and both said it was the best thing he could do. As the Deputy was anxious to fetch the rum, we could stay with the Bedrid no louger; but the Deputy kindly enlightened me.

"He's the best customer we've got," said he: "he's been where you see him now lying these months and months. He's got a parrylatic stroke through saying 'Lord, strike me a cripple,' so they tell. He's a wonder at livin'. 'Cept bread, rum and saveloys is *his* wittles. He drinks rum all day long, and he has reg'ler two saveloys for his supper. Got money? I should rayther think that he had. Where? Why, in his trowsis pockets, to be sure. Didn't he show you the braces of 'em? Well, he always wears 'em—never had 'em off once since I've knowed him. 'Course it's all gammon about wearing 'em in bed in case of fire; it's 'cos he's afraid of trusting anybody with his money. Where does he get it from? Ah! that's what *I* should like to know. There's a old woman—his sister, he says she is—comes to see him

once a fortnight; and p'raps she brings him it. Lor' bless you, he pays like a prince. When they're reg'ler, as many of 'em are wot lodges here, we chucks in Sundays; but he won't have it; he makes me the 'lowance of it; and many a sixpence as well. Well, d'ye see, I nusses him; he's helpless as a young 'um, and I fetches him his rum and that. How much? Why, about a pint and a quarten a day; and there he lays, singing to hisself mostly, but sometime swearing awful, and layin' awake all night for fear that any of 'em should get up to their tricks with his trowsis."

There was a good deal to be seen at Pugmaster's after this, but I could not banish the rum-swigging, saveloy-devouring, bedridden, frightful old savage from my mind. There was an opportunity for doing so, however; for, quitting the chamber of horrors I have mentioned, Mr. Deputy opened the door of a room between the foul bedrooms, from which there instantly issued loveliest odours of violets and other sweet-scented spring flowers that ever greeted human nostrils.

"That's a freshener, ain't it?" exclaimed the Deputy. "They're tiresome young beggars: but we always get this treat this time o' year."

"Who are the tiresome young beggars?" I enquired.

"The flower-selling gals," returned Mr. Deputy. "Them's their stocks;" and as he spoke, he pointed to a great pile of flower-laden baskets, by the side of what seemed to be a heap of tramps' cast-off rags. Violets were there, lilies of the valley, wall-flowers, primroses, and dainty sprigs deftly got up as "buttonholes." "They are obliged to be up very early to get 'em at Covent Garden, so they comes back and turns in again till it's time to ketch the swells as buys 'em."

It was nice to smell the sweet flowers in that pestiferous hole of Pugmaster's; but what about the villainous odours of fever and pestilence with which the innocent buds and blooms might become impregnated during their sojourn of several hours between the bedrooms of a common lodging-house? Who would suspect deadly malaria lurking in the blushing leaves of the dainty spring rosebud held so gratefully to the face of beauty? This subject provided me with

food for reflection long after I had parted from Mr. Deputy, and wooden-legged Giles; but the object that clung to my memory, and haunted it, was the hideous old bedridden man of money, who passed months abed in his trousers, living on raw rum and saveloys.

IN THE BLACK COUNTRY.

THE pedestrian explorer of odd places in and about Staffordshire would, in the event of his approaching either Netherton, Rowley, Lye Waste, or Bromsgrove on a Saturday afternoon, encounter a spectacle that might rather puzzle him: a straggling procession of men and women and children, the majority of the former sober, but a few of them drunk, and one and all so scantily and shabbily dressed that their poverty-stricken state of existence is at once made known. Each of them is carrying a number of iron wands like a bundle of withies for weaving, but secured in the grip of a twist of iron wire, instead of by a green osier twig—rods of various lengths, from four to ten, and of different sizes, from that of a man's little finger to the thin end of a tobacco-pipe. The lighter loads are in the custody of children, chiefly boys, but some of them girls, and varying in age from seven upwards, each one shouldering his property, and trudging along at a sedate pace, with a countenance expressive of the practice of mental arithmetic under difficulties, the key to which was to be found in iron rods past and iron rods present; the little old men and women, looking rather like adults growing down than children growing up; grizzled old handicraftsmen and women in pinafores; children used to fire and forge, hair-singed and smutty, and with their dimples showing like wrinkles with the grime of smithy smoke that traced them; youngsters whose boots showed their upper leathers singed and scared with fallen chips of red-hot metal, and with hands that, according to nature, should not have advanced beyond the round and chubby stage, corned and bumped at the knuckles, and with nails worn down like those of a file-grinder.

The puzzled explorer would naturally be curious to ascertain of what kind of mothers such children could be born. There they are—the women who come toiling down

the road, sometimes with a load of rods on one arm, and on the other a baby drawing nourishment from a breast so smutty and rusty-looking as to give rise to the idea that it must be gritty with iron filings. Women well able to carry such a double load, however. The size of their arms is prodigious. Here comes along one laden with baby and iron, a wizen-faced woman, lank as a plank and about as symmetrical, but whose bared right arm and the fist terminating it might belong to a prize-fighter—a brown fist with a broad thumb, and an arm with sinews standing out like tanned cord; and a muscle—for the woman, like the majority, wears her gown-sleeve "tucked up" as a male mechanic wears his shirt-sleeve—that bulges to the size of a penny-roll.

Let the puzzled explorer bottle up his curiosity, and come this way again—say, to Lye Waste, on Monday, for an explanation. Let his visit be deferred until dusk of evening or later, and this is the picture that Lye Waste will show him. First, though, as to sound. Lye Waste is a village of considerable dimensions, stowed away and hidden from the main road; but before it is reached, dark though it may be, you are made aware that it is not far off. The very air seems to tingle with a tinkling, not a loud banging and ringing of lusty full-grown hammers and anvils, but a kind of infantine clamour of the sort, as though this was the nursery of hammers and anvils, and rare play was going on amongst the youngsters. Tink, tink, tink, thousands of hammers, thousands of anvils and no more real noise than six Woolwich farriers might any day in the week be backed to make if they would but give their shoulders to it. Tink, tink, tink, louder still, and now you come within sight of Lye Waste Village and its thousand fires, and its cruelly hard-worked and badly paid colony of nail-makers.

One of the quaintest sights that can be conceived, and well worth the contemplation of those who delight in discussing the "rights of women," and whose tender sensibilities are shocked that the gentle sex should engage in such masculine employments as setting up printing types or fixing together the tiny wheels of a watch. These are the tender-hearted souls who are scandalized by the knowledge

that in France and other barbarous countries women frequently perform the drudgery here assigned to the commonest of labourers—street sweeping, brick and mortar carrying, &c. Did they never hear of the female blacksmiths of Staffordshire? There are not a hundredth part of them here at Lye Waste, which may boast of a thousand at least. You may count them any night, for there is no shyness or delicacy in the matter. Here in the village are rows and whole streets of smithy hovels, and the fronts are wide open, and there you may observe them. If you like to "stand" a can of beer, you may enter the smithy and have a chat with them—but idle only on your part. Time is too precious when a woman, stripped like a man from wrist to shoulder, must face the forge for fourteen hours a day before a shilling may be earned.

I cannot help repeating that, coming on it for the first time, it is one of the strangest sights in the world. The streets of Lye Waste are narrow and not unclean; and, as before stated, by the side of every house is a smithy, and each one contains from two to five "stalls" or "hearths," as each fire is called; and at night-time the light is so great that street-lamps are rendered a superfluity. By the ruddy glow that streams out from the numerous hearths, it would be quite easy to find a pin dropped in the middle of the street. Whole families work in these smithies. It is nothing uncommon to find a mother and her three lusty daughters, fully of marriageable age, stripped to their stays, and, with a kerchief over their shoulders, wielding the hammers and tugging at the bellows, and working away with a will, amongst the banging and roaring and spark-flying, and singing as merrily as larks, if not as melodiously. Children, too—the youngsters that the puzzled explorer met last Saturday. The rods they and their parents carried were nail-rods; and here they are, the small Vulcans, sweating over an anvil, set up according to their nature, making brads. Pale little wretches, most of them, the firelight betraying with cruel fidelity their haggard, unchildish faces, each one wistful and anxious with the consciousness that bread to eat must first be earned. It appeared odd enough to see the women standing in the smithy ashes with a big hammer in

their fist; but it was infinitely more painful to watch these tiny brad makers, with a wisp of rag round their heads to keep the baby growth of hair out of their eyes, straightening their small backs and spitting on their palms before they grasped the hammer to make the most of the last "heat."

The hearths or stalls are not the property of the nail-makers: they are rented at the rate of fourpence a week each, the landlord finding the fireplace and bellows. I saw some "treadle hammers," connected with anvils, that struck me as being very ingenious, although the working of them must be cruelly hard work for a woman. As with other blacksmithing, there must be two hammers used on a piece of red-hot iron, a small one to polish and a big one to beat. In the instances I allude to, the big hammer was hung at a convenient height above the anvil, and connected with a treadle such as is attached to a knife-grinder's wheel on the ground. I saw an old woman making nails in this single-handed fashion in a manner that would have been diverting were it not for the knowledge of how severely her old limbs must be taxed. She would bring a "heat" from the fire, clap it on the anvil, and with her left hand manœuvring the nail about, her right hand striking it with the small hammer, she thrust out a foot and vigorously worked the treadle; and as the big hammer worked up and down, clump-clump, her aged head kept time with it, till it seemed that the whole machinery was convulsed with the throes of dissolution, and must presently fly all to pieces.

Part of the purpose of my visit to the Black Country was that I might accomplish that tremendous feat—as essayed with more or less success every day of their lives by about 350,000 of my fellow-creatures—descending into a coal-mine. The one I selected I had some previous knowledge of. Two years and a half before I had tramped to Locks Lane to behold a miracle. The Locks Lane pit—the deepest and most important in those parts—had suddenly "flooded," shutting in thirteen poor fellows, whose chances of rescue were scarcely worth a moment's consideration. This being Wednesday morning, so formidable was the body of water below that it must be at least next Monday before there would be a possibility of reaching them, and by that time foul air,

combined with hunger and thirst, would in all probability destroy them. Well, the miracle that I saw was twelve out of thirteen of these same miners—men and lads—brought up out of the bowels of the earth after more than a hundred and thirty hours' dismal and hungry imprisonment there, and one and all of them not so far gone but that the best of nursing and medical skill could set them up again.

Pit scenery does not alter much with time and season. There was the "hovel," or lamp shed, where I had seen the appalling figures lying on mattresses arranged on hastily brick-built banks, and warmly wrapped in sheets and blankets so brand new out of the draper's shops, that the tradesman's "private ticket" was still attached to them. There never were sheets that looked so snowy white, because there never were sheets that gained so much by contrast with that which they enveloped. Sooty-black was but cream colour in comparison with the ingrained jet of the poor gaunt wretches in whose emaciated frames life feebly fluttered. But the black was more merciful than the white—the awful dead white round about their mouths where tender hands had moistened pocket-handkerchiefs, and wiped them so that they might not swallow coal grit along with the driblets of water and weak tea that at present was all that the doctor dare administer to them. The hovel was restored to its legitimate purpose now; but as the door opened, it seemed to me that I could again see the beds, the great fire at the end, the miner nurses—all the nurses were miners—with the one who so jealously guarded the latchless door by sticking a pickaxe deep into the earth, just against the inside, every time any one was compelled to leave or enter, and that other fellow—long life to him!—the wooden-legged nurse who, so that he might not make over much noise in getting about his special patient, had muffled the end of his stump in an old woollen stocking. There were the pit's mouth, too, and the enormous pumping-engine with its beam thick as a man's body, and long enough to reach from roof to roof across any back street in Bethnal Green, and which, when it is on its mettle, can raise, from a depth that three Fish Street monuments piled on each other would do little more than fathom, 550 gallons of water per

minute. It was not on its mettle now, thank Heaven! It was doing its work at the leisurely rate of about six strokes per minute, which, considering I was presently to make acquaintance with the bottommost recesses of the gulf where lurk the watery deposits it is its constant duty to keep in check, I was thankful to see.

I think that the majority of persons who never saw a coal-pit would at first view be somewhat disappointed at its external aspect. There is very little bustle at the shaft's mouth, and no more excitement or noise than one man and one horse can create. All that can be seen is a round hole in the earth of about twice the diameter of a large "loo" table, and above it is a great windlass, from which a thick wire rope depends taut into the black chasm. A smoke, evidently from burnt coal, comes up the pit in a faint cloud and the hole is surrounded by a square wooden railing about three feet in height. From the hole there is a line of narrow railway running down the slight decline to where the coal, as it is raised, is shot, and on these rails run the dumpy iron wheels are affixed to the bottom of the cage or corfe, which is filled in the mine and raised to the surface bodily. When I saw the corfe full of coals make its appearances out of the black hole I breathed a sigh of relief. I wanted to know how we were to get down, and I saw plainly enough now. We should all—there were five of us—get into this commodious wooden box; and I quite fell in love with it on account of its tall protecting sides and secretly "spotted" the part of the box in which I intended to stand, which was *not* the side where the rotten plank was and the hole through which came up protruding a fine piece of coal, just about the size of a man's boot. The banksman drew the load off a flat grating, like an ordinary area grating, of about six feet square, and suspended by a chain at each corner, connected with a bar overhead: and crossing again from bar to bar, at a height of about five feet, was another chain. When the banksman brought the empty coal-tub back, and was about to slide it on the grating, the person in authority said, "Never mind that; we are going down this turn."

Then my eyes were opened. We were not to go down in the box, but on the naked, sideless grating, "holding on" by a

chain that crossed about the level of my chin. True there was not *much* smoke coming up out of the fathomless gulf; but a little goes a great way with some folks; and since I had had no experience either up a chimney or down a pit-shaft, it was not improbable that I might find the objectionable fumes potent enough to set me sneezing and gasping. One thing was certain—if I sneezed till I was in danger of dislocating the small bones of my neck, I dare not for my life's sake spare a hand for my pocket-handkerchief; and in this desperate frame of mind I took my stand with the rest, and next instant felt myself sinking.

I should have mentioned that the square railing of wood fixed round the pit's mouth was movable; indeed, when the great coal-tub ascended, the machinery caught hold of the railing and lifted it up of the way. When the perilous-looking little stage on which we crowded had sunk a yard or so, the railing, on self-adjusting principles, came down with a sounding noise, that, to the untutored ear, was not a little alarming. Down, down, easy as sinking through water, with no particular inconvience on account of the smoke, after one had inhaled a few mouthfuls of it; down, down, steady and noiseless, and in such pitchy darkness that for all that could be seen of the sides of the hole they might have been a mile apart, until the full distance of nearly two hundred yards was accomplished, and the machine slackened in its swiftness and gently touched the floor. My first impression was that the place was insufferably hot; but this was accounted for by the fact of the pit's furnace being only a few feet from the "pit's eye"—a devouring dragon of a fire-place that consumes I am afraid to say how much coal, but it is well worth its food on account of its invaluable assistance in ventilating the pit. Still pitchy dark—for the back of the furnace was to us—and the "Butty" called out for lights. They came in the rough, for company was not expected. Something small and white, and about waist-high was seen to approach us from out of the impenetrable gloom; and then there was the sound of striking a match, and the "something" turned out to be a bunch of tallow-candles that a man was carrying. Besides the "dips," he had a lump of moist clay, and by means of it he provided each of us with a "candle-stick"—a

ball of about the size of a hen's egg, with a candle stuck in it; for the Lock Lane pit is accounted so free from inflammable gases, that a hundred and twenty men and lads who work it use naked lights, "Davy's" being used only by the "Butty" (manager) or his Deputy in going into a working that has been lying idle, to test it.

But we were not in any working yet. This was merely a "gate road,"—a way by which the great coal tubs were dragged by the horse from the place where coal is got to the bottom of the shaft up which they are to ascend. The gate road is about twelve feet wide, with an arched roof about seven feet overhead. At distances about as far apart as street lamp-posts, "dips" of the same feeble capacity as those we carried were stuck against the wall with dabs of clay, yielding almost as much light from the red noses of their unsnuffed wicks as from the thin half inch of flame that surmounted them. The floor of the "way" was carpeted with thick, moist-feeling coal dust, and the walls were shiny enough to reflect the light. It was not blackness everywhere. Clinging to the roof in countless places, and hanging from it in fantastic fashion, were masses of fungus, snowy white as sheep's fleece, but which turned to a disagreeable brown paste as soon as it was handled. I know this because I plucked a nice-looking piece and, to keep it clean, placed it in my cap; but a tickling at my ears soon gave me notice of its dissolution. After a walk of a hundred yards or so we came to a place where men were at work, and I got my first insight into the art and mystery of "coal-winning."

It is necessary of course. My coal cellar and yours, dear reader, cannot be replenished without men invade the appalling depths where only this useful mineral is to be obtained; the demands of civilisation and progress, from the roasting of a goose to the fuelling of an ironclad, cannot be accomplished without it; but from a simply humane point of view, coal getting is a horrible business. It is quite impossible at first sight to regard it as a means of earning bread, of which a man need 'be no more ashamed than though he were a carpenter or a grocer's shopman. The dungeon darkness, the slavish toil, the repulsive grime and

nakedness—all seem so foreign to one's preconceived ideas of honest labour that it is hard to realise but that this must be something different. In no prison in England are men so vilely used, in a sanitary sense, at least. Oakum picking, treadmill turning, stone quarrying—compare either of these convict occupations with that of a man who is by trade a "pikeman" in a coal mine.

The process is easily described. His work is to do the "holeing," for blasting, and he sets about it as follows; he divests himself of jacket, shirt, everything except his flannel drawers, and he is naked from a liberally calculated waist upwards. He has a solid wall of coal to assail. He takes up his pike, which is shaped like a road maker's pick, but is about half the size, and he lies down before the face of the wall, with his dim dip stuck in a bit of clay to light him, and commences his job. The height from the ground is a little more than from an ordinary chair seat to the floor, and he picks and picks until he works his way into the coal the length and breadth of his own extended form. He doesn't stop here; he has to cut in twelve or sixteen feet, until he is so buried under the coal mass he is undermining that all that is seen of him by his little twinkling light is his powerful arm swinging to and fro in the process of picking, and all that can be heard are the blows and the poor wretch's puffing and grunting as he goes on burrowing and burying himself. Sometimes he may be heard spluttering as well as grunting; but this is when he falls on a "wet piece," and the sodden coal dust splashes into his eyes and mouth. It isn't as though he were at liberty to protect his face. He is huddled in all of a heap, with his head resting on one arm as with the other he wields the pick, and makes the chips fly.

"Do they object to wet pieces?" I inquired.

"They take it as it comes; *they* don't mind. Some of 'em like it because it's cooler." And here, by the bye, I may mention a rather curious circumstance connected with undermining of coal, as related to me by the person I was addressing, a mine manager of life-long experience. Some few years ago there was a twenty weeks' strike amongst the colliers, and the pits were idle all that time. My informant

was a "butty," an individual who contracts to get out coal at a certain rate. He had a contract "on" at the time of the strike, and lost several hundred pounds by it, by reason of its being discovered that when the twenty weeks closed pit was opened again nearly all the cuttings that had been made ready for blasting had "healed up" again, but by what wonderful natural process the healing had been brought about my friend was unable to tell me.

Attached to the pick man's department of coal getting is a staff of what is known as "slack carriers." The "slack" is the small bits and chippings that the pick man accumulates about him as he makes his way under the solid coal, and the stuff accumulates so rapidly that it is necessary to remove it at frequent intervals, and this is the slack carrier's job. He is a boy. It is a modern mining law, I believe, that no lad under thirteen shall be employed at this work; but there are objectors to this regulation on the score that, as a rule, boys of thirteen are "too big" for the business. If it might be done with the sanction of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, it is a pity that a tribe of small intelligent monkeys could not be trained to the work. It is a reproach to human kind that boys should be made to do it. A slack carrier is literally nothing else than a beast of burden. He wears harness, poor little chap!—a broad strap round his naked waist, to which is attached a chain passing in front and between his legs, and fixed to the slack box, which is a receptacle of iron. When the pick man is deep in his "cutting," it is then that the poor little drudge has to crawl as well as he is able into the black chink, pushing the iron box as he goes, or dragging it after him; and having by means of an iron shovel filled it with slack, drags it out again, in the same manner. He bruises his head against the low roof, his knees are corned, his legs are chafed by the shameful iron chain, his mind is deadened and brutalised by his constant slavery and the rough treatment of his taskmasters, but all this, we are told, is the proper apprenticeship to make him a "good miner;" and when the age of thirteen was fixed by law as the earliest at which a child might engage in the perilous and degrading work, there was a general outcry that thirteen was too late to

begin, and that the new law would be fatal to the prime old fashioned miner breed.

Besides the pick men and the slack boys there are many other branches of mine work, and whichever way we turn were to be seen perched up here, or grovelling there, men and lads, inky black and naked to the waist, but grinning contentedly through their grime, and pulling, and hauling, and shovelling, and picking with a lusty heartiness that bespoke their complete unconsciousness that their condition was pitiable. The great difficulty, as I was informed, is to compel them to take mere ordinary care for the safety of their own lives. The very horses who work in the pit are provided with quaint-looking shields for their heads and faces, made of the stoutest bull's hide, so that they may, to some extent, be secured against having their brains knocked out by coal falling from the roof; but the miner, as a rule, works bare headed, or with nothing better than a flimsy cloth cap on his head.

Only a day or two before my visit to the Black Country an event happened frightfully illustrative of the criminal negligence of miners when left to themselves, as well as of the brutish indifference of many of their number to the chances of a sudden and violent exit from life. The place where the accident in question happened is known as the Baptist End Pit, and is situated just by the village of Netherton. The said pit had been closed during several years, and preparation were made for opening it again. Concerned in these preparations were three men of the name of Hotchkiss—a father, son, and cousin. The elder Hotchkiss was foreman of the job, which was to descend into the pit and fix "air troughs." It was dangerous work, and the men knew it; they had worked down to a depth of three hundred feet, and at that point "choke damp" was to be feared—the terrible agent of death that approaches swiftly and silently, and may neither be tasted nor smelt, but to breathe which is as fatal to the senses as a dose of chloroform. But, in the words of the only surviving witness of thelittle working party, "the elder Hotchkiss was a reckless chap." There were "lash chains" wherewith the men might have made themselves fast to the bare grated platform of the skip on which they

descended, and on which they stood to work; but the foreman disdained all such implements of precaution, and the three went down a hundred yards deep, and with, perhaps, another hundred yards below them,to stand and work with no more security against falling than though they were mounted on a table-top.

But this was not the full extent of the man Hotchkiss's wicked folly. Having, by means of lowering a candle, discovered the exact height to which the deadly damp had risen in the long disused pit, with a daring that even in a miner is scarcely credible, Hotchkiss deliberately, and with expressed intent, had the skip lowered until it was in such a position that the men could work *with their bodies in the choke-damp and their heads out of it.* Nor did his two companions see anything in the act sufficiently mad or outrageous to urge them to declare against it. Working thus up to their very necks in the jaws of death, the men continued for a few minutes, and then, in the witnesses' own words, "the damp popped up," and father and son slipped away into the abyss almost before the third man missed them, and in a few seconds lay crushed and dead at the pit's bottom. And now comes the climax of this instructive episode in the life of a miner. The man remaining on the skip threw himself down and across it, and halloed to the banksman to "hold;" but instead the latter allowed the skip to be lowered to the bottom of the shaft, and so, of course, further imperilled the poor fellow's life. The banksman explained to the coroner that directly after the word "hold" reached his ears he heard the men "drop" from the skip, and thought that all of them had fallen off, and that he gave the engine-man the signal to hurry the skip to the bottom, hoping that if any of them were alive they would "crawl on it."

But certain evidence the banksman further volunteered provokes the suspicion that possibly he had misunderstood the cry that came up the shaft. He had been at his post *thirty-six hours* unceasingly; nor did he speak of it as a something that might possibly astonish his hearers, or as being at all remarkable. "It is not exhausting work," said John Jones, the banksman, "but it is work that requires watchfulness and wakefulness," and when one comes to

understand that it is the banksman who controls the engineer having charge of the sole means by which the sinkers in the "black damp" shaft might be raised or lowered, one does not feel disposed to controvert John Jone's last assertion. However, he declared that, although he had been on duty rather more than what a London bricklayer would call three days and a half, full time, he was both watchful and wakeful. The Government inspector, who was present, gave his opinion that not any of the colliery rules had been infringed, although at the same time he expressed his coincidence with the view taken by the coroner, that no man should be allowed to remain at his post so long a time as thirty-six hours; and so, with a verdict of "Accidental Death," the matter terminated.

JACK ASHORE.

THE nautical enthusiast who, in these degenerate days, set out on a pilgrimage to Wapping Old Stairs, in hopes of passing a pleasant hour with the worthy descendants of the heroes and heroines immortalised by the late Mr. Dibdin, would probably find himself disappointed. In vain he would search for that constant Molly whose artless declaration of her virtue—spotless as those trousers which it was her proud privilege to wash—can no more be doubted, than the fact that her love for Thomas was as warm and as sweet as the grog which she made and presented to his manly lips at the very earliest opportunity after his landing from the ship that had so cruelly borne him away from her. Fruitless, too, would be his inquries after Harry Hawser, or Jack Robinson, or Billy Buntline, or any recognisable descendant of those flip-swigging, hornpiping, free-handed noble old bragging sea dogs, brave as lions in battle, playful and blythe as kittens in their shore frolics, and tender as boiled fowl in their greetings and partings with sweethearts and wives. The modern Jack-ashore is altogether a different being from that Jack of old, whose theatre of pleasure extended from Tower Hill to Shadwell Church, and who passed the whole of his time "'twixt cruises" in uproarious hilarity, the patron of fiddlers, and the very soul and essence of good-humour and sprightliness. Here are the old taverns where jolly Jack Tar, both of the Navy and of the Mercantile marine, used to drain his can of flip, jingle his guineas, and, as a worthy son of Britannia that rules the wave, exhibit a proper contempt for land-lubbers, one and all. Here are the old taverns, as well as several of modern build, and they are ablaze with gas and plate-glass, and there are announcement of concerts and dancing-rooms. Men in reefing jackets pass in and out, some alone, and some in close companionship with females in ball-room attire. There is the

sound of music within, and shrill female laughter. This is promising. Let us enter the "Old Frigate," and see how the modern Jack-ashore deports himself.

A first look round somewhat damps one's expectations; the more so, because it is evident at a glance that the male customers who cluster about the extensive bar are seafaring men, and that the females present are their consorts. A terrible-looking lot the latter—brutal, blear-eyed, savage, from fifteen to fifty and over, all with a thirst for gin as ferocious as that of the tiger for blood, and with as little consideration for the victim who supplies it. No blandishment or "blarney" with those bruised and bloated Black-eyed Susans; no ogling or make-believe of affection, or even of affable toleration, for the men whose pockets they are draining. They demand more gin or rum with the air of a Whitechapel fighting man in female disguise, and spill it down their capacious gullets without so much as a bare "thanky." But perhaps these are not fair samples of the modern "lass that loves the sailor." The "concert hall" is at the end of a passage; a curtain screens the entrance to it; and no doubt within its more secluded precincts, Jack-ashore, and in search of that lovely charmer, a few hours in whose blissful society gives ample reward and consolation for weeks of toil upon the raging main, is more fortunate.

Delusive hope! The "concert hall" was as melancholy a place as could be imagined. At the end of the room there was a raised platform, with a shabby attempt at scenic decoration, and a fiddle and a harp; and at intervals a female "came on" and favoured the company with a song, not much more indecent than many to be heard at any music hall. Afterwards the singer with her low-necked frock and her short skirt and "fleshings," moved among the audience with cigars and tobacco, and received its congratulations, together with any odd pence it might please to bestow on her, over and above the price of the Havannahs. That was all the "fun," if so it may be accounted; which was by no means certain, judging from the apathy and listlessness of the forty or fifty Jacks-ashore who sat at the tables in company with the bare-armed brazen vixens who honoured them with their company. A very large percent-

age of the Jacks had spruced themselves up; and by the flashy rings on their little fingers, and their bran-new silver watch chains, and the sea bloom of bronze on their faces, it was evident that they had been but recently paid off, had put money in their pockets, and come out "on the spree." It was early in the night, and, though many of them were in that supposed hilarious, devil-may-care condition, known in nautical circles as "half-seas over," there was not a jolly sailor among them. If they were now enjoying themselves, it must indeed be a heart-rending spectacle to see them when they confess to being dejected. They were as flat as though the salt in their veins had all turned to soda; and I don't believe that among them, had every man contributed all he possessed, they would have mustered spirit enough for one good-fashioned hornpipe. They were dull and stolid, and good for nothing but drinking.

This, at least, was evidently what the women thought—drinking and fleecing. A heartless, cold-blooded set of ogres! I do not speak exclusively of those assembled at the "Old Frigate," but of the scores and hundreds besides who were to be found that night, or any night, haunting Ratcliff and Shadwell, and lying in wait like beasts of prey for spooney modern Jack-ashore, to hocuss and pillage him. They are a peculiar breed of females, I believe, that have their lairs in Tiger Bay, and Back Church Lane, and Palmer's Folly, and other awful places contiguous to the Docks. They appear different from the vilest creatures of any other part of London, and they act differently. The grit of vice seems to have scoured their natures bare of all that is womanly, while it gives the keenest edge to their cunning and rapacity.

Just imagine one of these petticoated bipeds taking pride in the snowiness of her Thomas's trousers, or treasuring his 'bacca-box! If it would fetch fourpence she would swallow it in a quartern of gin before Tom's ship was out of the river; and as for its being "marked with his name," she would regard that rather as a provoking circumstance than otherwise, since it rendered the article less saleable. Jack-ashore has wonderfully altered with the times. He sits like a fool, and allows a tigress of the "Bay" to get

drunk at his expense; and when she has cleaned out his pockets she will snatch his cap from his head, and fling it in his face, and threaten some horrible visitation to his eyes and liver if he dare accost her again. Should he be too wary to let her dip her hand into his pocket, and so "drink him dry," she will permit him to accompany her to her den; and he is a remarkably lucky Jack if he escapes therefrom with the clothes on his back.

Occasionally, once or twice a week, these cases of robbing and stripping are brought under the notice of the police magistrates; but it is a fact which the police of this infamous district could corroborate, that if the plunderers were prosecuted in every instance, his Worship on the bench would find his time pretty constantly occupied with them. Jack ashore, however, has no love for the police or police-courts, and would rather bear the loss than risk the ridicule of his shipmates.

"Then that settles the matter!" the reader may exclaim. "Premising that your Jack is not a born idiot, he must expect to be left to his own self-defence, like other folks; if he neglects common-sense precautions against those whom he knows to be his enemies—if he walks into danger with his eyes open, and is content to pay the inevitable penalty—why, let him."

But sailors are not like other folk. They are victims of tradition. From time immemorial it has been the custom for Jack-ashore to seek his pleasure in a certain neighbourhood, and in certain ways; and a very large number of individuals are good enough to provide taverns and concert-rooms at which Jack is an expected guest when he has a spell of rest from sea-voyaging. Jack is not ungrateful, It would seem like deserting the ship to turn his back on Ratcliff Highway, where, solely and wholly in his behalf, the publicans, the saloon and lodging-house keepers, have been at such vast expense to provide for his delectation.

Moreover, it is Jack's weakness to regard himself while ashore as a guest, not as an inhabitant and a tax-payer who has a personal interest in parochial affairs. He lives at sea, and he is only on a visit to land; so that it is not good manners to object or remonstrate if he should not happen to

agree with the habits and customs of his entertainers. He sits down to the board as it is spread for him, and the arrangement of the feast is no affair of his. As with his amusement, so is it with his ashore business in the purchase of his clothes and jewelry—in the cashing of his advance note. He regards everything as being all right; and even if he has suspicions that this affair or that is slightly irregular, he contents himself with the reflection that it will be "all the same in the long run." He may do very well aboard ship, but he is as a fish out of water whenever he sets foot on land; and he will never be better until competent persons take his case in hand, and snatch him from those vultures of Ratcliff who are his undoing. Of course, I am aware that his case has been taken in hand, and that a magnificent building, known as the Sailors' Home, stands open for his accommodation in Wells Street; but somehow or another that admirable establishment is not appreciated to an extent that makes it overflow with lodgers, or encourages its managers to institute other Sailors' Homes on a like plan.

In no respect, however, does Jack exhibit himself so much in the light of a big helpless baby—a creature to be protected against his own acts of foolishness—as in his disregard for his own life, while toiling aboard his ship for the wherewithal to come "capering ashore." Grim experience must have convinced him of the uncertainty of the most esteemed vessels; and he knows perfectly well, that should he be cast into the sea hundreds of miles from land, and with only his own limbs to support his body, he must be drowned. He knows that storm or accident may bring him to this fatal predicament any day or any hour; and in the face of possible death he shakes his obstinate head and will not avail himself of the means of life-saving his friends hold out to him.

Jack does not believe in life belts and buoys. They are 'old-womanish," and fit only for milk-sops and cowards. Jack, who occasionally may be found with an infant's "caul" sacredly secured in a litttle bag about the bosom of his guernsey—a caul purchased at a cost of three or four guineas, in the sure belief that the miserable shrivelled little scrap of skin will keep him afloat in the most tempes-

tuous sea—laughs to scorn the most substantial cork waistcoat, which would cost five shillings, and would infallibly keep his immersed body from sinking. He has any number of excuses for setting his mind against wearing cork belts and life-buoys. He will tell you that they are not to be depended on; that he has seen men trust their lives to them, and been cruelly betrayed—for, hampered with their water soddened weight, the wearers have been carried to the bottom.

And, to the shame of humanity be it spoken, this accusation against so-called life-buoys may occasionally be founded on fact. I don't know whether by this time they have reformed their villainous ways; but I can state from personal experiment, that a couple of years since the slop-sellers of Ratcliffe Highway kept commonly on stock belts which were duly stamped "all cork," but which, on being dissected, turned out to be merely straw and rushes which, under pressure of seven pounds of iron, soaked and sank in a very few minutes. But Jack knows perfectly well that he can trust the National Life Boat Association, which is constantly persuading him to provide himself with an article that costs no more than a bottle of Ratcliffe Highway brandy, and for the genuineness and efficacy of which the managers pledge their reputation. This fact made plain to Jack, he immediately tacks about, and declares that "bad is the best" as regards both buoys and belts, and asserts his belief that at a pinch they are but little better than instruments of torture, keeping a man up very likely while he starves by inches, instead of going down at once and being saved all the suffering.

This was positively the argument used to me by an ancient mariner of the Royal Mail Packet Service, and that in the presence of the most convincing evidence to the contrary which could possibly be set before a man. The occasion was the return to Southampton Docks of the "Douro" from the Island of St. Thomas, after the memorable hurricane of 1867, which devastated that place and the ships that were lying in harbour there—among others the mail steamers, "Rhone" and "Wye." From the former vessel one of the few rescued by means of a life-buoy was a lad named

Bailey. There were only seven buoys on board the ship, and four out of the seven were the means of saving so many of the crew. The lad Bailey obtained his buoy in a somewhat miraculous manner. When the "Rhone" smashed up, and the few survivors of her crew were clinging to ragged splinters of wreck in the furious sea, Bailey, who was holding on to a spar, saw at a little distance an able seaman girt with a life-bouy; but, as he enviously watched the fortunate A.B., one of the sharks with which these terrible waters abound nipped the man in two below the waist, and in his agony the poor fellow flung up his arms. The result was than the remainder of the body slipped through the buoy, leaving it vacant. Being a remarkably cool hand for his age, the lad Bailey swam to the abandoned article and slipped his head and shoulders through it. Beat out to sea, worn out and exhausted, he fell asleep without knowing it, by good fortune grasping the side cords tightly in his hands. Hours afterwards he cast up on the beach, the rasping against the shingle waking him; and there—for I saw it myself—was the impress in the soaked yellow paint of Master Bailey's hair, where his heavy head had rested on it. The ancient mariner of the "Douro" saw it too, but still he shook his thick old head, and regarded Master Bailey as if he thought that, for the credit of a favourite nautical delusion, it would have been more becoming in him to let the buoy alone, and sunk without any fuss.

It is a grave fact, however, that Jack speaks only half the truth when he assigns as a reason for not adopting the life-belt, his independent conviction that he is quite as well off without it. Were he to reveal his mind with perfect candour, he would confess that those who are in authority over him—in the merchant service, that is to say—iniquitously, and, as they believe, to serve their own ends, do their best to make him ashamed to be seen with either belt or buoy. It is a disgraceful fact, that the most unwelcome visitor on board the majority of the merchant ships lying in our docks is the agent of the Life Boat Association, who comes with the view of persuading the captain or his mate to permit the use of additional life-saving apparatus on board their ships. As tested by the Government order, they carry

a notoriously insufficient number of buoys, and openly express their contempt and disapprobation even of these. The excuse is that they make the men "chicken-hearted." Emigrant ships, no matter what their tonnage or passenger-carrying capacity, are required by the law to carry but *four* life-buoys and *six* life-belts, which, in an emergency against which they are expressly provided, would probably save ten lives—certainly no more.

Ordinary merchantmen carry but two buoys, and the captain won't have more, though they are offered at the low price of ten shillings each, and each will, with ordinary care, last a dozen years. "I've got seamen aboard my ship," sneered one polite gentleman whose crew reckoned twenty-two; "we don't want life-buoys here, nor any nightcaps, nor no smelling salts, nor warming-pans; and I wish you a very good-morning." Another captain spoke out his reason in a much more honest and brutally blunt fashion. "I like my fellows to understand that they've got to keep my craft afloat, or sink with her. Men will work like devils to save their own lives, but how much respect would they have for my property if, a few miles off shore, we were in danger of foundering, and every fellow could dance over the sides with one of these nuisances made fast to him!" There were the regulation "two" buoys on board this amiable captain's ship; and one feels curious to learn what, in the event of this calamity at which he hinted, would be his behaviour. Would he cast the "nuisances" left and right, one to the cook and the other to the cabin-boy, and take his bare chance with the rest; or would he in obedience to "Nature's first law," encircle his waist with one of the charmed rings that make a man proof against death by drowning, and leave his "fellows" to do the best they could?

Jack-ashore is not given to literature; but he is curious in the matter of "charts," and has a religious belief in all that bears the Admiralty stamp in proof of their authenticity. Does he ever see the Wreck Chart which is published annually? It is no secret to him that many ships are lost at sea, but it is doubtful if he had any idea how many. The Wreck Chart would show him at a glance. It would be specially interesting to Jack the coaster; for of all men who earned bread on salt water, the

coasters are those not encouraged by masters and mates to despise a currish leaning towards life-belts—while they are the very fellows, it may be assumed, who might be tempted to abandon the crazy old collier rather than go down with her. Here Jack would see the fair face of the ocean, especially about certain notorious reefs and rocks and banks, hideously dotted—every black dot marking the spot where there has been wreck and death. He would discover places over which he had sailed many a time blotched as closely as the pock-marks on some men's faces. He may read, in the report accompanying the Chart, that hundreds of these wrecks occurred either a few miles from shore, or in a part of the ocean highway so commonly trafficked over that, had the poor fellows whose lives have been sacrificed but possessed the means of holding up in the water for only a few hours, they might have stood a fair chance of rescue.

In the matter of life-saving it may sound almost inhuman to discuss the question of "cost;" to set widows' weeds and orphans' tears on one side of the scales and a few paltry shillings on the other; but still it may be as well that the reader should know what life-buoys cost. It is a fact that a manufacturing firm of standing and eminence—that of Messrs Birt, Dock Street—has offered to place the necessary apparatus on any number of ships that may desire it, to convey the same on board, and provide suitable boxes to keep it in, to visit the shops and examine the articles, and make good any deficiency, at the rate of one shilling per annum for every belt or life-buoy in use,

THEATRE ROYAL, WAPPING-WAY.

"On Saturday evening will be presented at this theatre for the first time a new and original domestic melodrama of thrilling interest, entitled *Rubies and Rags; or, a Work-Girl's Perils.* Cherry Plumpton, a pretty and virtuous young needle-woman; Sir Dazzler Hawkmoth, a profligate scion of aristocratic birth; Jackal Jem, a heartless scoundrel and a lion's provider; Mealy Mike, a kind-hearted baked-potato man, a true, though humble friend to the poor, &c., &c. Boxes, 1*s.*; Pit, 6*d.*; Gallery, 3*d.*"

The evening above mentioned was a warm one, but the enterprising lessees of the Theatre Royal had not miscalculated their prospects of a crowded house. The theatre afforded accommodation for at least fifteen hundred persons, and within a quarter of an hour of the doors being opened it was filled from floor to ceiling. The audience, which had been drawn entirely from the immediate locality, was of a decidedly mixed character, the costermonger element mustering in force. Prominent, too, in pit and gallery were many young men, lank and lithe, who wore handkerchiefs limp and wisp-like as an eel-skin, and who were remarkable for a curious oleagineousness both of clothes and skin, suggestive of an easy slipping out of the grip of a policeman.

The most fastidious manager, however, could not desire a more attentive or a more appreciative audience. The opening scene discloses Cherry Plumpton, the pretty and virtuous young needle-woman, attired in white muslin, trimmed with pink bows. Her attic is but meanly furnished —indeed beside the chair she sits on and the table she works at, it appears to contain nothing but a pair of bellows and a canary bird in a cage. She sings, however, and stitches away at a tremendous rate, and is supremely happy. Then comes a tap at the door. "Come in," cries Cherry, cheerfully; and in he comes—Sir Dazzler Hawkmoth. Like

all profligate scions of noble birth of the nineteenth century, he wears a tunic of Lincoln green, laced with gold, and hunting-boots, and a three-corned hat of crimson velvet heavy with bullion trimming. Sir Dazzler starts. Pardon him, he has made a mistake—has been wrongly directed. He is in search of an old dame—his old nurse, in fact, who is residing somewhere thereabout, and is, he has heard in sore distress. Cherry says something complimentary respecting his kindness of heart, and Sir Dazzler remarks on Cherry's beauty. Cherry blushes and hides her confusion under an offer of chickweed to her canary. Sir Dazzler follows up his success. He draws from his finger a ring, the diamond in which from its size should be worth about three hundred pounds, and offers it to her, at the same time clasping her in his arms, and exclaiming, "Sweet girl! jewel of my a-hear-r-rt's core! be mine!" The effect is electrical; Cherry's virtuous indignation is instantly aroused, and she proceeds to revile the scion of noble birth in such withering terms that he visibly cowers and shakes at the knees. "What," cries Cherry, holding up the diamond ring, and addressing the gallery, "what is this glittering bauble compared with the priceless gem of virtue!" It was the first applauding outbreak since the drama opened, and it was a rattler. The coatless young costermongers, as with one voice, roared "Bray-vo!" Grey-headed men of sinister aspect were seen to wink hard with both their eyes and repress the visible tear; even the slippery young men in the pit, speechless in their admiration for the ennobling sentiment, thrust their fingers in their mouth and whistled shrilly.

Sir Dazzler slinks out of the house, gasping with rage, and in the next act is found still in green velvet and hunting-boots in the tap-room of a public-house of call for robbers and ruffians of reckless enterprise in whispered converse with Jackal Jem. Sir Dazzler hands the latter gold, and the Jackal hisses "She shall be yours," and forthwith whispers the baronet that the dastardly deed shall be accomplished. Sir Dazzler expresses his assent, and they part. Barely have they done so when Mealy Mike emerges with his steaming stove aud his glowing charcoal fire from

behind the tap-room door, where he has been an unobserved listener to the dastardly compact. Mealy Mike knows Cherry Plumpton, and in a serio-comic manner, and during the eating of one of his own scalding hot baked potatoes, he relates a moving story of how Cherry once nursed a little daughter of his through a dreadful fever. Mealy Mike swears to deliver the virtuous work-girl from the machinations of her enemies.

The third act discloses the arch villain and the lion's provider, Jackal Jem, stretched on a wretched pallet in a miserable house. His face is chalked to a ghastly hue, and his rascally head swathed in a wisp of dirty white rag. Jackal Jem, however, is only shamming sick. He sits up in bed and chuckles in a ruffianly manner at the artful trap that is set to catch the artless Cherry, whom, it seems, he has sent to, imploring her to come and nurse a miserable penitent wretch, sick well nigh to death, and despised by all the world. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughs the awful villain, "and presently she'll be here, and Jackal Jem and Sir Dazzler Hawkmoth will square their little account!" The detestable imposter drinks from a rum bottle, concealed beneath his pillow, and then comes a knock at the door, and he hastily conceals it, and, with a dismal groan, bids the knocker enter. It is the tender-hearted Cherry. She approaches the ruffian's pillow to whisper consoling words to his ear, when, with a savage laugh, he starts up, seizes on her, and gives a shrill whistle. Instantly there emerges from a cupboard Sir Dazzler Hawkmoth, still in green and gold, and carrying a hunting-whip. "Ha, ha!" he cries, mockingly; "now my pretty scornful one, you are mine, and no earthly power can save ye!" He is mistaken, Mealy Mike can! All unsuspected, that philanthropic baked-potato vendor has lain concealed under the bedstead. With an exultant cry, he crawls out seizes on the horse-whip, and lays on to the Jackal as well as the base baronet, while the audience applaud frantically, and evince by their behaviour their delight that vice should be frustrated and virtue protected.

But there is another act yet, Cherry Plumpton is in the hands of the police! Sir Dazzler has accused her of stealing his diamond ring, and she is sent to prison for three months.

It is winter time when she is released, and snow is falling fast, night time, too, and Cherry, weary and famished, sinks down by the wayside. But succour is at hand! Mealy Mike is making his way home with his can and his fire, and has sold out all but two "mealy ones," reserved for his own supper. By the light of his fire he discovers poor Cherry. He kneels by her side and chafes her cold hands, and as soon as her senses return presses on her acceptance the two reserved mealy ones. With her head on his lap, and her white face well exhibited in the cheery light of the charcoal fire, he feeds her with hot potato to slow music. The picture is affecting. Sobs are heard in the boxes, sniffing is audible in the gallery, and even the sleek-looking young fellows in the pit snort undisguisedly, and stay the trembling tear with a corner of their eel-skin neckerchiefs.

But suddenly there is a commotion, and a crowd is observed coming down the road, and bearing in its midst, on a litter, a gentleman clad in green and gold. It is Sir Dazzler Hawkmoth, who has just met with a terrible railway accident in which Jackal Jem was smashed all to bits. The procession halts just opposite the spot where Mealy Mike is still playing the part of the Good Samaritan. Sir Dazzler on the stretcher with a shriek recognises the pallid female form on the ground. In feeble accents he summonses the generous baked-potato man to his side. Mealy Mike obeys, leading the shivering Cherry by the hand. Sir Dazzler, with a painful effort, withdraws from his bosom a heavy pocket-book, and presents it to her. "This! this!" he gasps, "will make some amends! Virtue you already possess, now I give you wealth! But say, oh, say! Can you forgive me?" She can and does, and so does the baked-potato man and so do the audience, and Sir Dazzler dies and the curtain falls, and everybody is made happy.

THE COMPLETE BIRD CATCHER.

METROPOLITAN improvements have at last stepped in to wipe away the disgrace that for so long attached to Bethnal Green for permitting certain of the streets to be used every Sunday morning as a public bird stock fair, and to be crammed and crowded during church time by the whole ruffianly brotherhood of London and suburban bird-fanciers Club Row and Sclater Street are swept away, but Somers Town is not extinct, and Great St. Andrew Street, in St. Giles's is still flourishing. At the insetting of August the close time for British birds terminates, and the professional bird-catcher prepares to resume that delightful occupation he has been compelled to suspend since early spring, in obedience to the dictates of an arbitrary Act of Parliament. 'Ware hawk, thrushes and larks; be warned in time, bullfinches, chaffinches, and goldfinches, and when you behold a two-legged creature, with a strange-looking pack at his back and several sticks in his hand—he is usually dressed in a smock frock with a flaming handkerchief round his throat, a battered old hat, knee breeches, and boots of the "ankle jack" kind—keep snug in cover or he will have you.

He is a wily sportsman and a treacherous. He does not come against you with a gun, from whose murderous barrel issues a sound of warning as well as a deadly shot. He comes with an artful contrivance called a "pull-net"—a wide-spreading engine of destruction, fifty feet one way and twenty the other. He arrives on the scene of his shabby manœuvring while earlier birds are yet in search of first worms. Arranged on the grass his treacherous meshes are all but invisible—quite so to a greedy young goldfinch, rashly guided to conclusions by a craving appetite. There is nothing in sight to arouse suspicion, unless, perhaps, objection might be taken to a lounging, lazy-looking man, who smokes a short pipe as he reclines on his stomach,

resting on his elbows. On the other hand, there is much to excite the curiosity of birds abroad on a foraging expedition, and to invite closer inspection. The joyous song of birds is heard proceeding from this particular spot. They cannot be seen (the cages which contain them having been loosely concealed by a handful of grass), but what is heard are unmistakably the notes of birds who are in luck.

Clearly it is a place where rich feeding may be obtained. It must be so, for there are the birds themselves fluttering with delight as they devour the dainty banquet, So it appears, for the feathered ones seen hovering just above the ground seem free to fly away when they choose. But it is not so. They are compelled to act the part of traitors. The poor birds wear about their bodies a harness of fine twine and are tethered to a peg, and the lounging, lazy man with the short pipe can make them perform their seductive dance at his pleasure, by simply jerking at a bit of string he holds concealed in his hand. The arch impostor has in his grasp other strings besides, and, for all his seeming apathy, an eye as quick as that of a hawk. The deluded free birds hover a while above the lure. The lazy one allows the short pipe to drop out of his mouth, and he licks his cruel lips anticipating a haul. Led by the giddiest, the birds sweep down, and in one appalling instant a double wall of meshes rises against them, and, clap! they are miserable, shrieking prisoners, struggling vainly against the great greedy hand that grabs at them to thrust them through the stocking leg that opens to the store cage, in which there are perhaps already a score of poor captives, who never again shall know what free flight is, or nestle amongst the boughs.

As the fisherman blithely brings his finny catch ashore, so does the smockfrocked man, with his store cage three deep of frightened little birds, contentedly wend his way to the buyer in St. Giles's. The latter has a shrewd eye and a quick discrimination in the matter of cocks and hens. The latter, to the shame of humanity be it spoken, are little better than a drug in the bird market. The catcher is not a sentimentalist, and the buyer has to sell again, and it would not bring a single tear to his eyes if you talked to

him for an hour of fledglings left to starve in the nest, and of eggs left to addle for lack of the loving warmth of the poor hen bird's breast. The bird shop-man parts them from the male birds as dross from wheat, and values them—the hens—at fifteenpence a dozen. For the cock birds—linnets or goldfinches—he gives from fifteen shillings to eighteen a dozen, a fact in the face of which sentiment has but a poor chance indeed.

The bird-dealer of St. Giles's and elsewhere does not, however, depend for his supply on the man with the "pull-net." He commissions other huntsmen as well. There are districts where food is plentiful and water scarce, and the snarer knows that at certain times in the day the birds will flock to a familiar brook or streamlet for liquid refreshment and a bath. After this enlivener a dainty mouthful comes not amiss, and the treacherous bird-catcher provides it, spreads his net with it, and "flings" up his brace birds with a will, that the little treat may attract due attention. Or solitary trappers make their way to the well-known haunts of the bullfinch and the chaffinch, and, taking a base advantage of the ruling weakness of both birds, which is jealousy, snares them with limed twigs. It is doubtful if even the wily slave-catchers of old Africa ever resorted to such a heartless device to inveigle from home and happiness the male head of the family. A devoted husband at all times and seasons, there is a time of the year when the male bullfinch or chaffinch's affection for the cherished mate of his nest drives him to such a state of insanity that his very beak turns blue. He—the same observations apply to both birds—must have an entire tree to live in, in fact he will not tolerate one of his kind inhabiting an adjoining tree if he can help it. It is his delight to perch on a top-most bough and to chant the praises of his beloved, and if one only knew bird-language, possibly challenging all creation to produce her equal.

By-and-bye there comes along his human enemy with his needle-headed whalebone slips, already plentifully besmeared with the best bird-lime—which is now made of mistletoe berries—his stuffed bullfinch mounted on a stick, and his decoy bird in its little cage, which is wrapped in a pocket

handkerchief. The chivalrous bird in the tree is still pealing out his notes of defiance when the trained traitor skulking in the handkerchief hears him and delivers a return volley. The free bird's crest rises and sinks in his ire, and he and the hidden one go at it hammer and tongs, as the vulgar saying is; meanwhile the bird-catcher is quietly affixing the stuffed and mounted bird to the trunk of the tree the passionate bird regards as his sacred domain, and is artistically sticking the limed twigs all round it. Suddenly the free bird in the tree, by this time raving mad with jealousy, spots the stuffed dummy, and with murderous intent launches himself at it. He strikes it down, but his revenge has cost him his liberty. The limed twigs hamper his wings, and he is grasped in the catcher's hand, and to-morrow will figure in a dirty little cage in the St. Giles's bird-shop, ticketed two and sixpence, and is a prisoner for life.

After all, however, much as we may deplore the unpleasant spectacle presented at this time of year by a St. Giles's bird-shop, there still remains the question would any valuable and lasting advantage be secured by the entire abolition of song-bird snaring and a suppression of traffic in all kinds of piping creatures, from the humble greenfinch to King Skylark? It may be true that nine-tenths of the feathered songsters taken by means of net or trap in our fields and meadows eventually find their way into the hands of those who domicile in inodorous back streets, and in narrow courts and blind alleys. It may be undeniable that the atmosphere of such places is little short of poisonous to human lungs, not to speak of the sensitive and delicate organs of respiration of little birds. At the same time it is a fact that confidently challenges contradiction that nowhere are to be found goldfinches, bullfinches, chaffinches, or larks in such prime condition, brighter of feather, or finer of song, than are found in the possession of the one-room lodgers of Squalor Street. Ignorant on more important matters, he—the Squalor Street lodger—may be shamefully indifferent to those sanitary usages on which the maintenance of health mainly depends, but he is knowing as regards bird-keeping.

It is, of course, inexplicable how it comes about that a free flyer of our woods and hedgerows—itself the very

embodiment of liberty—should ever be brought to submit cheerfully to the cruel fate that consigns it to lifelong incarceration within a railed-in space no wider than its own extended wings, and so shallow that any attempt at liveliness may be indulged in only at the expense of its unfortunate tail which is rubbed to rags against the back wall of its prison. But so it is. It is with birds pretty much as with children. As the latter laugh, and whoop, and halloa without reason or reflection, but merely because their hearts are so glad and their spirits so buoyant they cannot help it, so undoubtedly it is with song birds, caged or free. A sick canary or linnet "mopes" and is silent, just like an ailing child. But the song birds of Squalor Street and the whole surrounding neighbourhood do not mope. They are sprightly on their perches, and they impart an almost country flavour to the murky air with their free and frequent peals of song.

This as to the birds; then what as to those who buy and make pets of them? There is nothing congenial in the nature of a little song-bird that has attraction for a brutal-minded man. One can understand him taking kindly and with brotherly affection to a bulldog, but hardly to a bullfinch or a linnet. The last-mentioned sweet-throated little creature is a prime favourite amongst the lowest and rougher class. The linnet has no gaudy plumage to recommend it—nothing but its marvellous music, with its forty-six recognised and named changes of note. It is perfectly impossible that the man can degrade the bird, and equally it is certain that the bird can exercise no evil influence over the man. In its small way, and in doing all that is required of it, the lark or the linnet or the thrush appeals to the better part of a man's nature, and it does him good. It puts him in the humour for singing or whistling himself as he hammers at his leather as a shoemaker, or throws his shuttle as a weaver. It soothes him of evenings as he sits and smokes his pipe, and he grows fond of it, and one can hardly imagine a man chirping to his linnet one minute and the next making his wife and his children feel the weight of his hob-nailed boot.

THE ART AND MYSTERY OF SONG-BIRD TORTURE.

In all my spring morning experience of country rambling, I never before had heard such distinct and emphatic bird-music, crisp, sharp, and ringing out at regular intervals, as though the tiny creature from whose throat the sound proceeded was actuated by duty rather than pleasure. No wasteful and extravagant flourishes of melody—no whimsical jumble of notes short and notes long, with wanton twitterings between, such as a free bird among green boughs delights to indulge in by way of demonstrating what a happy and independent fellow he is; but a shrewdly calculated and systematic performance, as though after every renewed effort, he wound himself up for the next, and was bound to deliver himself to the instant of a certain quality and quantity of music, as per contract. I knew just enough of bird vocalization to be aware that it was a chaffinch that was discoursing, and stood up on the stile where I had been sitting to see if my methodical little feathered friend might be discovered. My elevated position enabled me to see over the hedge; and on a bank on the other side, with their noses to the grass, and their slip-shod, broken-toed, down-at-heel boots lazily flourishing in the air, there reclined two individuals of a sort one might least of all expect to encounter at peaceful Highgate early on a Sunday morning.

Least of all, because their appearance was so glaringly uncountrified. Bethnal Green announced itself in the mangy-looking caps they wore, in the short pipes they smoked, in the ingrained grime with which their expressive countenances were dusky, in the bulky wisp of dirty-white cloth that enveloped their throats and a considerable portion of their close-cropped polls. They were sturdily built fellows, an old man and a young man, and resting between them was a square parcel tied up in a blue "birdseye" pocket-handkerchief.

What might be their business in these peaceful regions at seven o'clock on a Sunday morning? Was it a case for the police? Were they a couple of burglars? Were they lurking at this secluded spot until what they thought was a good time to sheer off with the "swag?" Was that the swag tied up in the blue "birdseye?"

"Chirp to him, Carrots," growled the old man to the young one: "keep his pipes agoin'."

Whereat the young man made a noise with his lips, and the "swag" in the handkerchief promptly responded with a burst of bird-music similar to that which had previously astonished me.

"There's a note for yer!" ejaculated Carrots, proudly patting the blue birdseye bundle with his dirty paw. "Talk about yer Middlesex rubbish, with their toll-loll-loll-kiss-me-dears; they don't touch yer reg'ler good 'chuck-we-dos' by any number of chalks. Bust me, if I wouldn't back him agin anythink as ever sung atween wood and wire!"

The secret was out now. Mr. Carrots and his friend were not burglars, but bird-catchers; and, curious to make the acquaintance of a "chuck-we-do," who was such a "reg'ler good 'un" that making a portable bundle of him did not put his pipes out, I made my way through a gap in the hedge, and, by means of an offering of tobacco in exchange for a pipe-light, at once established friendly communications.

I now discovered that there was a second cage, in the wooden top of which was a hole fitted with part of the leg of a woollen stocking that dangled loose inside. This, I was told, was the "store-cage," but there were no captives within it at present. Outside the store-cage, however, and temporarily attached to the wires of it, was a stuffed chaffinch mounted on a stick, in one end of which was a sharp spike.

"That there's the stale," Mr. Carrots civilly explained; "and these yer is the pegs, and this yer is the lime." The latter was contained in a tin box, and had the appearance of thick flour paste. "It's innercent-lookin' ain't it?" said Mr. Carrots, "but it'll hold tighter than glue. See here."

On which he took a small portion between his finger and thumb to demonstrate the lime's superior sticky qualities;

after which he wiped his finger and thumb on his red hair. The "pegs" were slips of whalebone of about the stoutness of the thin end of a tobacco pipe, and furnished, like the stick the stuffed bird was mounted on, with a spike at one end. But I was chiefly curious respecting the "chuck-wee-do," who, during our conversation, had been making punctual delivery of rattling, loud-sounding notes from the confines of the pocket-handkerchief.

"Why is he called a 'Chuck-wee-do,'" I inquired.

"Why is he?" replied the old man, with good-natured pity for my ignorance; "why am I called Nosey Warren? Why's he called Carrots? 'Cos it's the name of him, to be sure."

"But some one must have given him that name."

"There you're wrong agin," said Mr. Carrots with a grin; "he give himself the name. There you are; hark at that! Don't he say 'toll-loll-loll-chuck-wee-do,' as plain as possible? Werry well, then; that's wot he means, and wot he'll stand by, agin any battling finch as comes in his way. It's the natur' of him."

"Just the same," put in old Master Nosey Warren; "just the same as the Middlesex finch calls hisself toll-loll-loll-kiss-me-dear; it's the natral note of 'em."

"I should imagine that the Middlesex finch's note was the prettiest of the two," I ventured to remark.

"It's the most bounceable," growled Mr. Carrots, contemptuously, "and aggrawating, but he's nowhere when it comes to battlin'. There's a battler in that there hank'sher as'll do your 'art good, if you'll only stay and hear him."

And Mr. Carrots shook a corner of the "hank'sher" as the hand of a friend in whom he had every confidence, and snorted defiance at the surrounding country.

"I suppose it would put him out if you were to let me have a peep at him?"

"Not a bit on it," remarked the obliging old man; "he'd no more mind it than I should mind drinking your 'elth in a pot o' beer; *he* don't care."

So saying, he whipped off the handkerchief, and exposed the little bird in its cage. A prim-built finch, with a deal of Bethnal Green in the set of its rakish, wire-rubbed tail;

but the eyes in its sharp-looking little head, though open, were dull and blank.

"What a pity that it is blind," said I.

"It ain't blind," said the old man, artfully winking one of his own bleared optics; he looks it, but he ain't; his eyes is only scaled.

"An accident, eh?"

"No; a purpose. *I* scaled 'em. It makes 'em stiddier to scale 'em—stiddier at their work, I mean. Lord bless yer, I've scaled scores of 'em."

"And how do you scale them?" I asked.

"Oh, there's different ways among the fancy," replied the terrible old wretch; "*my* way is with the needles.

"With needles?"

"Ah; you ties five of 'em—fine cambric ones—to the end of a bit of stick, and you makes 'em werry hot, and you holds 'em close, so that the eyes may kitch the 'eat well, and that brings the scales on 'em. It don't spile their walue. The scale wears off in a few weeks; and if it don't," continued the awful grey-haired villain carelessly; "if it don't wear off, it tain't no odds—a pegging finch is as good without eyes as with 'em."

And, as though anxious to corroborate his master's assertion, the blind bird in the cage opened its blue beak, and made the hillside echo with a musical salvo.

It would be mere waste of space for me to attempt to describe how I felt towards the horrible man, whose own eyes were so weakened by age that he was fain to screen them with one of his shockingly dirty hands, as he gazed upwards to see if there were any birds about. One thing was quite evident; he was perfectly unaware of the enormity of the crime he had just confessed to; while as for Mr. Carrots, taking no interest in talk so tame and common-place, he went on liming twigs ready for business, and sticking them convenient for handling behind his ear, as a clerk sometimes carries his pen.

"I suppose," said I, restraining my indignation, "that the bird's being unable to see accounts for its indifference as to how it is carried about."

"That makes no difference," replied the bird blinder;

"he'd as lief be carried about purwided he could see; he's trained to it. It's all in the trainin' of 'em. I've had battlin'-finches—we calls 'em battlin'-finches when they're trained for match-singing or for pegging'—wot 'ud sing in my hat as I walked along, and without being in any cage at all."

"But why do you call them battling-finches?"

"'Cos they battle," Mr. Carrots struck in. "You'll see this 'ere one battle presently, I hope; he's only waitin' for a chance. Hark! Bust me if there ain't a chance!" There were some tall poplar-trees at a short distance from where we were sitting, and as he spoke, Mr. Carrots nodded his head in their direction, and, catching up the store-cage, signed to the old man to follow with the blind battler whose cage was once more tied up in the thick pocket-handkerchief.

At present, however, I could neither see nor hear anything of the "chance," the occurrence of which had roused Mr. Carrots to such sudden activity. Birds were singing here and there; there was a lusty-lunged blackbird carolling in a neighbouring chestnut tree, and several skylarks warbling overhead; but what seemed to engross Mr. Carrots' whole attention was a sharp, metallic sound of "pink—pink—pink—pink!" proceeding from the boughs of one of the tall poplars before mentioned.

"That's the mark," hurriedly whispered the now thoroughly roused and excited Mr. Carrots, "that there tree to the left; he'd open if our'n would give him a challenge. Why don't he give him a challenge, a lazy young swine?"

This last abusive epithet was directed by Mr. Carrots against the blind Bethnal Green finch who wore the blue bird's-eye handkerchief; and as the young man with the limed twigs behind his ear spoke, he gave the muffled cage a shake to remind the occupant of his duty. He responded bravely, "Toll-loll-loll-loll-chuck-wee-ee-do!" Nor was the challenge for an instant disregarded. A finch of the true battling blood harbouring amongst the poplar boughs responded with a valiant burst uttering precisely the same sounding notes as the Bethnal Green bird had used. "That's good enough," said Mr. Carrots; "you're booked my beauty." And then he stepped away from us, and, armed with the tools of his craft, approached the poplar.

"Now you'll see a game," grinned the abominable old manipulator of hot needles, as we sat down on the grass; "it's on the principles of jealousy that we peg 'em. It's like this, d'ye see? The chaffinch is such a pug-nashus young warmint, that when he takes a mate—a hen, don't you know—and they makes a nest, he won't have any other finch in his tree or near it. If any other finch comes nigh, he's game to fight him an the spot; just the same as you or any other fellow might who caught a strange cove a whistlin' round your lodgin's where you an' your missus lived. It's his pluck that's the ruin of him. You'll see in one minnin."

While we were talking Mr. Carrots was not idle. His preparations were curious. First of all, quietly approaching the poplar tree, he stood the cage that was tied in a handkerchief, and which contained the blind "battler," at the foot of the tree, and, plucking a few handsful of grass, strewed it over, so that the cage was scarcely visible. Then he took the spiked stick on which the stuffed bird was mounted, and stuck it firmly into the trunk of the tree about six feet from the ground. Next he took three of the thickly smeared limed whalebone twigs from behind his ear, and which, as before remarked, were furnished with a spike at one end, and stuck these also into the tree trunk at short distances from each other just above the stuffed bird. This completed the preliminaries, and Mr Carrots came back to where we were, and flung himself on his stomach, his red hair bristling through the holes in his ragged cap in the intensity of his excitement.

Then commenced the "battle" so scandalously unfair towards the deluded free bird, who was doomed to fall a miserable victim to love and chivalry. The Bethnal Green deluder (a great deal of my pity for his sightless condition subsided at that moment) opened fire and rang out a peal so impudently melodious, that it was no wonder if Mrs. Finch in her nest started and opened her twinkling eyes wide in wonder and curiosity. No wonder also if her honest husband's crest bristled with indignation, and that he at once darted out to see who it was that dared behave so. He flew out from the boughs, and from a neighbouring tree took observation; but possibly excitement and jealousy clouded his

vision, and he could not discover the aggressor. What he could do, however, was to reply with a note as loud as that which had disturbed his domestic peace, and which said as plainly as possible, "Don't sneak behind the leaves: don't be a coward as well as a finch of abandoned character; show yourself, and let us come to an understanding."

The impostor from Bethnal Green could not show himself: but he seemed to lose none of his malicious relish for the sport on that account. Once more he raised his libertine notes, and this time with a stress on the "wee-do!" the effect of which was to drive the free bird to the verge of insanity. The terms of his response were in the nature of shriek rather than song, and again he darted out and fluttered hither and thither. "Toll-loll-loll-chuck-wee-ee-do!" piped up the Bethnal Green ruffian, apparently aware of the free bird's terrible condition of mind, and exulting in it. The free finch began again, but broke off as short as though his emotion had choked him. This, however, was not the case. It was gratified fury that had so suddenly checked his utterance. He had discovered the intruder, the impudent villain who had dared to come to the very threshold of his abode—with the full knowledge that he was at home too—to serenade his lady love. Yes, there he was; there was that conscienceless finch, sitting on a twig below, as calm and unruffled as though he had not the least fear for results. Vengeance! Swift as a dropped stone, and with beak and wings extended, the outraged chaffinch dropped from a height of twenty feet at least.

But, alas! the treacherous limed whalebone receives his outspread pinions, and his scream of fury becomes a dream of fright, as he tumbles to the ground with wings as helpless as though they were skewered through.

"Toll-loll-loll-chuck-wee-ee-do!" crowed the traitor in the handkerchief, while Mr. Carrots, with his mouth open and his claws outspread expectantly, rushes up as fast as his slipshod shoes will let him, to make good the cowardly capture.

Had I been as chivalrous in the cause of virtue and right as the chaffinch was, I should have immediately given battle both to Nosey Warren and Mr. Carrots, and set the prisoner free; but, not being to that extent chivalrous, I made a com-

promise with my conscience, and ransomed the palpitating little victim at a cost of fifteenpence, and restored him, I trust a wiser and more discreet finch, to the bosom of his family; while the three conspirators, the bird-blinding scoundrel, Mr. Carrots, and the finch in the birds-eye handkerchief, went on their way.

It was months afterwards, when I happened to get into conversation with another of the bird-catching tribe, and casually mentioned to him what I had heard about pegging for chaffinches. He shook his head contemptuously. "Pegging for chaffinches is all werry well in its way, but it ain't like reg'ler bird-ketchin'; that don't come on till this time o' the year; the roarin' trade is done when the dealers is a-buying stock. Now's the time for ketchers! It 'ud do your 'art good to go down Sclater Street and round about that quarter just now." A sight that does a man's heart good is always worth seeking, and in quest of such a treat I promptly made my way to Sclater Street.

It was before noon when I arrived at that salubrious locality, and certainly I did not find myself immediately in the enjoyment of what I had been promised. Sclater Street is not a nice street. It may not be responsible for its dilapidation, for its poverty-stricken aspect, or its peculiar atmosphere—which seems to be composed chiefly of the exultations from fried fish-pans, and from the shops of French polishers, tinctured with essence of mouse-cage and rabbit hutch. I could have no doubt, however, that Sclater Street was the bird market to which my chaffinch blinding acquaintance had alluded. The bird shops there were bewildering, both as regards their number and the marvellous display they make. The dealings of the shopkeepers in the feathered tribes are by no means confined to birds of song.

They "go in" extensively for pigeons and poultry as well, with this peculiarity—they display the latter in song-bird cages. I saw a goose in a blackbird's wicker cage, which was close to the window pane. I was first drawn towards it in admiration of the workmanlike manner in which, as I thought, the goose had been stuffed and preserved, and the delusion was maintained for the several seconds during which it fixed its stony gaze on me. Then, however, discovering possibly

in my aspect something more promising of relief, or at least of symphathy, than it had of late been used to observe, to my amazement it gasped dolefully and winked hard, as though to squeeze out a tear. I never was so upset by goose before. But this is not the only extraordinary exhibition of farmyard produce that Sclater Street affords. Cocks and hens may be seen crammed all alive into cages so straight that their tails and feathers spread out in all directions between the bars to be nibbled and tugged at by the ferrets and fancy mice whose cages are in the immediate vicinity. There are ducks, too, in the windows of those unwholesome dens—upside-down ducks, ducks that seem to be erect on their tails, ducks with their legs tied together and grovelling on their bellies, huddled all together, crooknecked with close crowding, and gazing, as only a duck in distress can gaze, through the bespattered window-panes, as though imploring the merciful interference of the passer-by.

But my mission was not in this direction. I had come to get my heart made glad by contemplating the joy of the songbird-catchers; and even as I was for the first time looking about me, two of that privileged fraternity hove in sight. They came from the direction of Bethnal Green, and evidently had just arrived from a catching expedition. They bore evidence of having been not only in the country, but on the country. Their rags were smeared with clay; their boots were double-soled with it, and plastered to the very eyelet holes. There was clay on their hats, on their hair, and on the ends of the handkerchiefs wisped round their throats—as though there had been clay on their faces too, and it had by this means been removed. They bore on their backs two or three of those peculiar long and narrow cages such as bird catchers carry, as well as their nets in a bundle. That they had had favourable sport was evident, for the narrow cages were crowded with small birds; but they seemed by no means hilarious. They came scowling and slouching along, and gave utterance to their dissatisfaction in terms sufficiently loud to be audible on the other side of the way.

"Why, that ain't fourpence a dozen, take 'em all round," growled one; "that's a dashed fine price to lay out in the

fields for since ha'past three this mornin'. I'd dashed sight sooner let 'em fly."

"I'd sooner jump on *my* dashed lot," rejoined his friend, "just as I'd like to jump on him, the warmint! with his jaw about gluts. Dash him and his gluts too! Let's come as fur as Slammer's, and see what he says."

I had noticed the name Slammer written over the shop of a worthy tradesman, who, by way of a mild hint as to what his business was besides bird-fancying, had displayed in his window, a picture shewing the head of a terrier whose ears had been trimmed, straddled across by a pair of shears. Likewise Mr. Slammer exhibited, though without the least ostentation, several pairs of "spurs," with their lacings, for the use of fighting cocks. I took a sharp walk back to Slammer's, and, before the two bird-catchers arrived, was in negotiation with Mrs. S. for a fine hedgehog, the price of which was tenpence. One catcher remained outside, while the other wriggled his long pack in at the narrow doorway, and regarded Mrs. Slammer insinuatingly.

"Old 'un in?" he asked.

"No he ain't," she replied, sharply, "and a good job too."

"Why is it? I got a rare good lot what I could sell him."

"That's why it's a good job he ain't at home," she retorted; "he'd buy 'em, the fool, if he was here, although we're already as full as a tick with 'em, and fuller. We've got 'em in the cupboard along with the wittles, we've got 'em under the bed. Howl's we've got there, too—three 'orns and a skreech—so we're pretty tidy full, I reckon."

But the catcher, with the perseverance of despair, unslung his pack while he was talking, and revealed to her his rich plunder of the fields—a full hundred, at the least, of small birds, chiefly of the linnet and redpole breed, along with a dozen or so of green birds.

"There, take the lot; you shall have 'em at five-pence a a dozen," said the bird catcher. It was at once apparent that Mrs. S. was tempted. She desisted from expatiating on the amiable qualities of my hedgehog, and went to take a peep into the long cage. She thrust her hand into the dirty stocking-leg that dangled at the mouth of the cage, and with professional dexterity stirred up the birds within.

"I'll wager there ain't ten cocks among 'em," was her verdict; "but they're cheap, dirt cheap."

"Buy 'em, then," said the catcher, laconically.

"Ah! but they must be cheaper than cheap to tempt me," returned Mrs Slammer: "there's a awful glut this season of 'em." The catcher glared at her for an instant as she uttered the obnoxious word "glut," but his eagerness to deal overcame his ire.

"Oh, blarm it, marm," he said, bringing his great hand down with such a thump on the cage that the more nervous of the redpoles leaped and shrieked in affright, "say four-'apenny a dozen, and say no more about it." Mrs. Slammer was a woman of business. She rummaged under the counter and brought out a cage of the capacity perhaps of a common hatbox.

"Shoot 'em in here:" said she, and the catcher, having done so with as little ceremony as though the live birds were coals or potatoes, took his price and departed.

By this time I had arrived at the conclusion that I had delayed my visit somewhat. It was the catching and stock-buying season—but the season was at its fag-end. There was one advantage in this, however, although not of a gleeful sort—it enabled me to gather some idea of the way in which these Shoreditch birddealers house their stock. Nor was I long in satisfying myself on this point, to very much more than my heart's content. The way in which certain of these newly caught little creatures are treated by the heartless ruffians into whose hands they fall is terrible beyond belief, and all the more amazing because it is no hole-and-corner atrocity. The barbarity perpetrated in these Sclater Street shops is wholly undisguised; and indeed such a public exibition is made of it, that it is quite evident the perpetrators, by long usage, have come to regard their abominable practices as allowable, if not excusable, and by no means likely to provoke the interference of the law. It is not only at one shop that the shameful spectacle I am about to detail may be witnessed, but, taking the worst among two score or so, they may be rekoned at a dozen at least. Admitting among the possibilities of bird existence that of being one day captured by the snarer, it is a lamentable disadvantage

to be born a hen, or of sober garb, and at the same time unmusical. Hen creatures are of no account at all among the "fancy." Nature may set a value upon the trash, and even regard it as absolutely indispensable in the matters of egg-laying and the tender nurture of helpless fledglings; but the fancier, wherever he may be found, is a man who has a proper contempt for Nature as an altogether incompetent party in works of creation. For instance, why does she send terriers into the world with their ears unclipped, and with undocked tails? The fancier's idea of a bird that has a legitimate claim to be so called, is a creature that has something to show for the price set on it, either in the shape of rainbow plumage, or in the possession of a good voice for song. It is the poor little creatures who are denied the gift of song, or who at the best are indifferent warblers, that suffer most at these dens.

Male canaries, linnets, and goldfinches, and songsters of similar value, are for the most part lodged seldom more than six or eight in a cage that would conveniently lodge one; but the commonplace and paltry "hens" of the various tribes are condemned to a prison existence that is nothing short of appalling. In every one of these dark and foul little shops—which are more often than not merely front parlours so called, with only what light can struggle through a grimed and paper-patched window, and smelling horribly in consequence of the large collection of "rats for the pit," of fancy mice, pigeons, chickens, hedgehogs, and ferrets, in which the shopkeeper deals—in every one of these dozen or so of shops may be seen exposed in the window a stack of cages, generally about fifteen inches long, a foot deep, and nine or ten inches high.

What composes the floor it is impossible to say, for it is covered some inches thick with dirt, seed husks, and the droppings of the birds. The iron wires of the prison are misshappen with adherent nastiness; and extending along its front is a thin trough, containing a liquid as unlike clean water as the contents of a ditch. Well—space is of importance in these pent-up back streets, where the rooms are invariably small and the rent invariably high. If the Sclater Street fancier had plenty of space at his command,

he might show a little more consideration for his "stock;" in all probability he would do so, since he could then set it out to better advantage.

As the case now stands, he is compelled to "take stock" at this season or none at all. He must make the most of his stowage room; and so it comes about that these terrible "Black-holes," the twelve-inch cages before mentioned, are made to contain at least *sixty* little redpoles and hen linnets and "green birds." There are perches, but they are unequal to the accommodation of the hapless prisoners. They crowd in the muck at the bottom of the cage, fluttering and struggling constantly, and uttering cries of distress as they endeavour to avoid the suffocating pressure of the rest; while many of them cling to the bars, holding on with their claws, and evidently feeling compensated for the inconvenience of the position by the advantage of being able to breathe with comparative freedom.

Through the windows of one of these bird torture-houses, I saw in a cage two poor little creatures dead and half trodden into the stuff that was heaped on the floor; in another cage there were two more, who had given over the struggle to keep their heads up, and lay gasping, wedged in a corner.

Seed trough there is none to these cages, though the presence of husks of seed strewed among the filth that covers the floor would seem to indicate that the wretched captives are sometimes treated to a few grains. No matter, however, so long as they are kept alive. The more a little bird is ill-used by starvation or other means, the more his body-feathers will set out from him, and he will look "plump as a ball" while in reality his breast-bone may be as sharp as a penknife. I saw a woman approach one of these abominable chambers of horror, with a bread basket in which there was about a handful of chips and stale crumbs of bread. She opened the lid of the cage, and the welcome shower descended all over its inmates.

They did not appear to mind the trifling inconvenience of crumbs or dust in their eyes. For the space of twenty seconds or so they appeared as though they were heaving and tossing and crying and gasping in deadly conflict. Even the prisoners who clung to the bars were tempted to forego fresh

air for the superior attractions of bread; and every beak was turned against one bird's body, fiercely hunting for crumbs amongst the feathers. While the *mêlée* lasted it was terrible. The birds sitting on the perches close as spitted larks, came down to the floor and fought desperately with those who seemed too weak and ill to stand—evidently under the impression that they were crafty birds who had stores of crumbs secreted under them, and went to devour them at their leisure. But the contention was soon at an end. The melancholy perchers resumed their places, the crowd in the dirt below shook down into something like their original condition, and again one saw the row of claws clinging to the bars, and of beaks thrust through, emitting such sorrowful twittering that it required considerable self-restraint in the beholder to prevent him from defying Sclater Street and all its villainous host of fanciers, and making a dash for the birds' rescue.

This picture of the battle of crumbs haunted me long after I left Spitalfields. It is next to certain that, besides being subjected to the torture of a filthy prison, and crowded together to the verge of suffocation, these poor little birds are starved as well. Those who keep them to sell, cannot afford to feed them. In many instances, the crowded cages bore the intimation that the price of birds within was three-halfpence each; but the majority were ticketed "a penny each," and not a few "a halfpenny." Now a bird that will realise no more than a halfpenny can by no manner of means be allowed the luxury of bird-seed. Vulgarly speaking, it would eat its head off in a week; and that would be an act of extravagance which the fancier, with his profit to look after, cannot permit. It is manifestly cheaper to let a bird "take its chance" and the few spare scraps it may be found convenient to cast into the cage. There can be no doubt that hundreds of these tiny feathered creatures at this season of the year are literally starved to death in these horrible places. It is not a secret business. Let any officer of the Society make an exploration of Sclater Street, near the Eastern Counties Railway Station in Shoreditch, and proceed straight through to Hare Street—and he shall find, not one, but fifty, instances of the atrocity I have now described.

AN OPIUM SMOKE IN TIGER BAY.

THE person who would enjoy the inexpressible treat attendant on the smoking of a genuine and unadulterated pipe of opium must make a pilgrimage for it. He must, for the time divest himself of all genteel scruples and every shade of civilized fastidiousness, and approach the mystic shrine unconspicuous among the humblest of the throng of opium worshippers. The main difficulty is to discover the whereabouts of the shrine. "It is the only establishment of the sort," a friend informed me; "there is scarcely a sailor hailing from the East who does not, so soon as he touches at a Thames port, hasten there at once to gratify his pent-up hunger for opium. The place is patronised, besides, by many distinguished members of the nobility and aristocracy of Great Britain; and it is rumoured even that Royalty itself has condesended to visit the opium-master in his modest retreat."

Hearing this, and learning that Shadwell was the region honoured by the residence of so famous a personage, I had no doubt that I should be able to find him easily enough; but my friend deemed it prudent to give me a few more explicit directions: "There are two ways of arriving at the opium-master's house," he said. "One is to make for High Street, Shadwell, and keep along till you spy a tavern, the sign of which is the 'Hoop and Grapes;' next to it is another tavern, the 'Gunboat,' and opposite is another, the 'Golden Eagle;' while within range of a pea-shooter are three other taverns, the 'Home of Friendship,' the 'Lord Lovat,' and the 'Baltic'—and the last-mentioned is at the corner of the very street. Or you may go another way, down Cable Street, till you arrive at a not particular inviting-looking thoroughfare, on a corner of which is inscribed 'To Rehoboth Chapel.' From the end of this street you make out a dingy-looking little public house, called the 'Coal Whipper's Arms.' The opium master's house is just handy—up a court."

Tiger Bay—or, more properly speaking, Blue Gate fields—has been so often described that it will be needless here to say more respecting it than that it is as tigerish as ever; that the dens to which, every night of the year, drunken sailors are betrayed, swarm and flourish openly and defiantly in spite of the police. I discovered that my friend, in describing the street that rejoiced in a Rehoboth Chapel and a 'Coal Whippers' Arms' as "not particularly inviting," had done it no injustice. It is in the very heart of the Bay, and from end to end it presents an unbroken scene of vice and depravity of the most hideous sort. Almost every house is one of "ill-fame." It was not quite late enough for the tigresses to make themselves sleek and trim, preparatory to going on their customary prowl through their hunting ground; and there they sat, or lolled, or squatted at their doors, blear-eyed and touzle-haired from last night's debauch. There, too, lounged, and smoked short pipes, and drank out of tavern measures the convenient resting-place of which was the window sills, the males of the tribe—the thieves and bullies, who, quiet enough now, would be wide awake and ready to show their quality when dark came, and the tavern gas was flaring. It was somewhat discouraging to find the mystic tree of celestial solace planted in such unpromising soil; but I comforted myself with the reflection that doubtless the eastern splendour of the opium-master's abode would shine the more brilliantly for the shabby setting. I entered the little public house, and, inquiring of the barmaid—who, all among the pots and glasses, and in fair view of several customers, was "changing her frock" as coolly as if she were in her private chamber—I was at once directed to the court where the opium-master resided. An awful little court it was, with a narrow arched entry, and pregnant with the peculiar odour of neglected gutters. The houses of the court were of three rooms and a washhouse order; and, as directed, I applied at the third house of the left hand row.

There was no one at home but the opium-master's wife; but as she is English, I experienced no difficulty in making known to her my desire. She exhibited not the least amazement that one of her own countrymen should have a craving after the celestial luxury.

"I 'spect it wont be long before he's back said she; will you call again in a little while, or will you come up?"

"I will stay till he comes in, if you have no objection," said I; whereupon she shut the outer door, and toiled slowly, like a person who is very ill, up the narrow filthy little staircase. I followed her. There were not many stairs, but she mounted them so slowly that I had ample opportunity, ere we reached the mystic chamber, of making myself acquainted with the smell of that which, if all went well, I should presently enjoy the felicity of tasting.

I cannot say that the odour was appetizing. The filthy little house seemed full of some subtle sickening essence lurking on the stairs and under the stairs, and ascending in invisible vapours through the many chinks and holes in the rotten woodwork. It seemed likewise to lie on the handrail in the form of a fine dust, that instantly melted to some loathsome moisture the moment the hand was laid on it. There was a window, either open or broken, somewhere overhead, as I could tell by the downward draught; but this was not an unmitigated advantage, for it stirred the dull leaden-looking hair on the woman's head, and the sickening odour was instantly and unmistakably increased. I have been since endeavouring to decide to what other familiar smell or ming-of smells the odour in question might best be likened, but not yet successfully. Treacle melted with glue over an open fire, and flavoured with singeing horse-hoof in a farrier's, might be something like it; but after all the comparison is feeble. Arrived at a landing, the opium-master's wife pushed open a door. "Come in and take a cheer, sir," she said, politely.

I went in, and unless I outlive memory I shall never forget the strange spectacle that was revealed. The room, at a rough guess, may have been eleven feet long and nine wide. An awfully dilapidated little den, the much-begrimed ceiling patched with rain leakage, and broken here and there, so that the laths were visible; the walls black with smoke and grease; the shattered upper panes of the foul little window plastered with brown paper. There was a bedstead in the room—a bedstead so large that there was left but a yard or so of space between it and the fire-place—a "four-poster,"

amply hung about with some kind of flimsy material, the original colour of which it is impossible to guess. But the bedding was more remarkable than the bedstead; for the bed was "made" the wrong way—across the length of the bedstead instead of its width, with a long bolster; and it was covered, instead of a counterpane, with a huge breadth of fine Chinese matting. A table and three chairs, if I remember rightly, constituted the remainder of the furniture in the opium-master's smoking-saloon, with a few gaudy prints on the walls, and the mantelshelf crowded with ornaments, evidently of Oriental origin.

Having surveyed the furniture, I was at liberty to contemplate the opium-master's wife. I have said that she was English, but it was only by her speech that her nationality could be so readily decided. A small lean woman, with such a marvellous grafting of Chinese about her, that her cotton gown of English cut seemed to hang quite awkwardly on her sharp shoulders. Her skin was dusky yellow, and tightly drawn at the nostrils and the cheek bones; and evidently she had, since her marriage, taken such a thoroughly Chinese view of life, that her organs of vision were fast losing their European shape, and assuming that which coincided with her adopted nature. She was very ill, poor woman. It was killing her, she said, this constant breathing of the fumes of the subtle drug her husband dealt in. She didn't mind it, she had grown used to it, but it "told on her," and lodged in her chest, and gave her a cough.

"You mean that it is the smoke from your customers' pipes that affects you," I remarked.

"There is no smoke from the pipes, it's too precious for that," replied the woman. "Nobody ought to smoke opium—nobody knows how to smoke opium—who is as wasteful as that." And she accompanied the severe observation with a shake of her head, and a glance that betokened her fathomless pity for a person in my benighted condition.

"Then how do the fumes, or the smoke, or whatever it is, get into your throat, ma'am?" I enquired, humbly.

"It's the preparing of it chiefly," said she, "which I'd better be doing now, if you have no objection."

On the contrary, I was but too grateful for the opportunity

of witnessing such a mystery. I was presently amazed, too, as well as thankful; for, dropping on her hands and knees, she crawled a little way under the bedstead, and again emerged with a saucepan—a common iron saucepan, capable of holding perhaps two quarts. This was a painful stab at my reverence for opium. Had I seen a vessel of ancient porcelain, or even a brazen pipkin, it would not have been so shocking; but a vulgar, smutty pot, such as potatoes are boiled in! I began to have doubts lest, after all, I had come to the wrong shop; but a searching question soon drew out clear evidence that I had been preceded in my visit by the illustrious travellers of whom I had heard. The woman placed the saucepan with the water in it on the fire, and then proceeded to fix on the mouth of it a sort of little sieve, the finely-woven meshes of which hung into the water. Then she shredded some cake opium, as sailors shred Cavendish for smoking, placed it on the sieve, and put on the brew to simmer.

I made no remark, for fear lest a further exposure of my ignorance might turn pity to downright contempt; but a light dawned on me. *This* was the secret of my failures with the opium pipe! I had procured the very best sort from the druggists, and filled with it the most freely-drawing of meerschaums, but nausea had been the only result. I had been guilty of the gross barbarism of taking my opium *raw!* It should be cooked—stewed in the manner that I have described; then the essence filters through the sieve, and falls to the bottom of the pot in the form of thinnish treacle, while what remains in the sieve is of no more account than common tea-leaves. The brew required some care, however; and, as I contemplated the poor woman with her head over the pot stirring and kneading, I could understand how it happened that so much of the noxious fume got into her hair as well as her chest.

After a while the sound of ascending footsteps was heard on the stairs, and the next moment the door was opened. "Here he is! I thought he wouldn't be long," said the woman. It was the opium-master; and he has brought home with him two customers of his own nation. Once again was I doomed to disappointment. I had pictured to myself an

individual of commanding aspect, richly costumed as a mandarin; but here came a shabby, shambling, middle-aged Chinaman, into whose apparel, if I mistake not, vulgar corduroy entered, and who wore his pigtail over a sort of stableman's smock. He had on Chinese boots, however, and a Chinese cap, which, on seeing me, he removed, bowing with great cordiality and politeness, as gracefully as his lame leg would permit. He looked at his wife inquiringly, and uttered the word "Smoke?" and, on her nodding affirmatively, he again bowed and rubbed his dirty hands, and turned with what I knew from its tone to be a whisper of apology to his two friends.

It was plain that he was explaining to them that probably I had been waiting some time, and it would be no more than courteous to let me have my pipe at once. But they were of no mind to be put off. They were dirty, savage-looking villains, evidently fresh from ship-board, and sorely itching for an "opium drunk." They wore knives at their waistbands, and their very pigtails seemed to stiffen in anger as they scowled on me. I hastened at once to declare that I was not in the least hurry, and would give up my turn quite cheerfully. They knew nothing of English, but the master did, and in his quaint clipped lingo thanked me, at the same time explaining that he possessed but two opium pipes, else we could all have been served at one and the same time. This little difficulty smoothed, the two dirty Chinamen, restored to good-humour, flung off their caps and leaped upon the bed with the agility and eagerness of cats bent on stealing fish from a dresser. They curled down on the mat counterpane, about three feet apart, and mowed and grinned at each other as they wriggled into a perfectly comfortable position, with their heads on the bolster.

Then, with much gravity, the opium-master commenced operations. Out of a cupboard he produced his tools—the two pipes, a sort of a tinder-box of the old-fashioned pattern, a slender iron bodkin fixed in a little handle, and a small brass lamp. The pipes were not a bit like ordinary tobacco pipes. Let the reader imagine a sixteen inch length of dark-coloured bamboo, as thick as a man's forefinger, hollow, and open at one end. There was no "mouth-piece," except the

wide, open bore: while, at the closed end, an inch or so from the extremity, was a screw hole. Into this was screwed the tiny bowl, made, I think of iron, and shaped like a pigeon's egg. The opium-master lit the little brass lamp, and stepping up on the bed, squatted tailorwise between his customers, with his tools ready at hand. The thing like a tinder-box contained the opium, but it was not, even after the stewing it had undergone, as yet ready for smoking; it had to be frizzled. It seemed to be about the consistency of treacle, and dipping in the tip of the bodkin, he twaddled it round till he had secured a piece as large as a common grey pea. This he held in the flame of the lamp till it was done to his liking.

Then he clapped the precious morsel into the pipe that one of the Chinamen was already greedily sucking, and, to all appearance, the ugly fellow was at once translated from earth to heaven. As the woman had previously informed me, the smoke that was drawn up through the stem was not blown out from the mouth—it was swallowed or otherwise disposed of by internal machinery. Nothing but what seemed to be the thinnest possible thread of purple vapour escaped from the pipe-bowl; and as the awful-looking being on the bed rapturously sucked and sucked, the thread became thinner, his face lit up with a strange light, and his pig-like eyes closed till but two mere streaks parted the lids —two streaks that glowed as though his eyes had turned to opals. While he was thus tasting felicity, the other villain was served, and presently there was a pretty pair. I never should have supposed the human countenance capable of wearing an expression so sensuous, so bestial and revolting. Faintly and more faintly still they sucked, till a gurgling sound in the pipe-stems announced that the opium in the bowl was spent; then the pipes fell from their lips, and they lay still as dead men. I couldn't bear to look at them. I felt as though I were assisting at some sacrifice with a strong flavour of brimstone about it; and felt quite relieved when I turned my eyes towards the fireplace, to observe the woman engaged in nothing more supernatural than gutting a haddock for her husband's supper.

In about ten or twelve minutes the hideous figures on the

bed evinced signs of revival. Observing this, the opium-master, who was still squatted on the bed, hastened to roll up a couple of cigarettes of common tobacco, and lit them by taking a whiff at each, after which he handed them to the Chinamen, who rose from the couch yawning, and, like men only half awake, staggered towards the fire, and sat regarding it in silence. They were not going yet; they had come for a "drunk," and would probably indulge in half-a-dozen more pipes before the evening was over.

Now the opium-master was at my service. I would have given more money than I had about me to have postponed my initiation in the art of opium smoking; but the demon on the bed was politely beckoning me, and I dared not say him nay. With a tremulous heart I mounted the mattress, but was firm in my resolve to take my pipe sitting, and not reclining. Direful qualms beset me in a rapidly rising tide; but I was an Englishman, and the eyes of at least one of the sleepy barbarians by the fire were blinking on me. The dose was toasted, and I took the great clumsy pipe-stem between my jaws, and sucked as I had observed the Chinamen suck. I swallowed what I sucked, or desperately endeavoured to do so, and the result was precisely what might have been expected. Without doubt I was stupefied, or I never should have ventured on another pull. That did it! Before I ventured on my perilous expedition I had a vivid recollection of what came of smoking my first cigar; but that dismal remembrance is now quite eclipsed by one a hundred times more dreadful. "Sispince, please!" said the still polite opium-master, extending his hand; but I hastily pressed on his acceptance the whole of the half-crown I had brought for the purpose, and was glad enough to find myself once more breathing the free and delicious air of Shadwell.

THE ONION FAIR.

You may smell them long before you reach the Bull Ring which is the place where the fair is held. They give a pungency to the air, and you can taste them on the lips, as salt of the sea may be tasted before the watery waste is yet in sight. But this mild foretaste by no means prepares you for the spectacle that greets the visual organs, when from the High Street you look down the Hill at the foot of which is St. Martin's Church. There is a square paved space, as large, say, as Clerkenwell Green, piled, heaped, stacked in blocks of onions, large as four-roomed houses. Onions in enormous crates, such as crockery arrives in from the Potteries, onions in hogsheads, onions in sacks, in bags like hop-pockets, in ropes or "reeves," loose in waggons that three horses draw; onions of all sizes and all qualities—"brown shells," "crimsons," "whites," "big 'uns," and "picklers." Onions block the roadway and brim over the pavement, and hung in bulky festoons about the railings that surround the statue of Lord Nelson, who is so exposed to the mounds and shoals that one might almost imagine the sourness of his iron visage was due to his dislike for the odour of the chief ingredient of goose-stuffing, and that he would be thankful could he but raise a handkerchief to his heroic nose and shut out the fragrance.

Not so with Birmingham's teeming population. The term "Onion Fair" is no empty name to them. From all parts they come flocking as eager as though onions were the staple of their lives and they had sliced up their last one a week ago. Why it should be so is a mystery. Why should Birmingham, of all places in England, exhibit such affection for the onion as to find it necessary to hold an annual sale of the coveted vegetable? What is there peculiar in the nature of the inhabitants of the town of locks and guns, that the pungent esculent should be so highly prized by them? Is it eaten raw, or is it cooked? Are steaks and onions a favour-

ite dish in Birmingham? Is roast pork with appropriate stuffing? There are three—four pork shops in the Bull Ring; the proud proprietor of one of them exhibiting in his window the silver medals that have been conferred on him because of his prowess in venturing to buy the fattest pigs at succeeding annual shows.

Who can tell how much this enterprising tradesman has been influenced in his purchases by the confidence, annually renewed, that every Birmingham housewife will have a store of onions, and that the onions suggest stuffing for pork? Onions are eaten with tripe, and tripe is an esteemed article of food in Birmingham. Tripe-shops—not shops for the sale of raw tripe, but establishments were it may be obtained all hot and well done—are as common as penny pie shops are in London. In Digbeth there are several tripe shops, each one claiming to be the "real original;" and of evening such fragrance of onions issues from the kitchen gratings as is enough to make the eyes if not the mouth water. In these various ways may the enormous demand for "brown shells" and "big 'uns," be to some extent accounted for; but as one contemplates men, women, and children busy among the heaps as ants on an ant-hill, and bearing off, with satisfaction beaming in their faces, onions enough to garnish steak or tripe through all the days of the year one cannot help thinking that the explanation is weak and insufficient.

It is not, however, to onions alone that the fair held annually in the Bull Ring, at Birmingham, owns its high popularity. It is not altogether the craving to secure the pungent vegetables in ropes and bushels that tempts people to start at an unreasonable hour on a September morning, on a journey of a hundred miles, or that induces railway companies to advertise through the length and breadth of London that, on a certain day, a cheap and gigantic excursion train will leave Paddington and Euston Stations for Birmingham, returning the same evening. The secret lies in the fact that the onions are, to strangers at least, only a seasoning to something much more attractive—a real old-fashioned pleasure fair. None of your modern semi-scientific and strictly proper entertainments, that may be attended in dress-shoes and kid gloves, but the dear and almost bygone rough-and-tumble,

sawdusty, naphtha-flaring carnival that our fathers recollect, with a merry crowd elbowing its way through long avenues of gingerbread booths, or responding loyally to the bewildering invitation to "Walk up, walk up," accompanied by the clash of cymbals and the bang of gongs.

Bartlemy is not dead. Frightened out of London, it has fled to Birmingham, and taken settled quarters in the Bull Ring there. It may be recollected that hot sausages were a much admired and prominent feature of the fair that was held in old Smithfield—well, here they are, fizzing in a dozen different spots; and you may buy one and a slice of bread, by way of a plate, for one penny. Oysters used to figure creditably at Bartlemy. They were cheap then. You might buy them as large as saucers at the rate of sixpence the dozen, and a dozen was a substantial feed for a family. But oysters are oysters now—or rather speaking of the Bull Ring fair, they are *not* oysters now—they are mussels. I would willingly conceal the fact if I might, and for the town's sake; but, alas for human nature! Brummagem *is* Brummagem even to its oyster stalls. It is a masterpiece of counterfeit. In the distance, nay, when you have closely approached them, they look quite the genuine article; and you rejoice at the sight of the tempting, fat little oysters at a penny a row of six; twopence a dozen! But it is a delusion. What you see so delicately reposing on the pearly shell are nothing but innocent little mussels, compelled to act the part of impostors. The supply of pearly shells is limited, and in constant demand. As fast as a customer licks a mussel off one, another is popped on for the benefit of the next customer

I am glad to have got the above-mentioned grievance off my mind, because all that remains to be narrated is unexceptionably pleasant and satisfactory. It is a most extensive fair. The Bull Ring itself could not contain half the shows that are there—no, nor a tenth part. There are all manner of shows. The drama, horse-riding, but not the menagerie. To be sure, there is something of the sort in Regent's Park; but the directors of the Zoological Gardens permit no Daniel in their den of lions. At the Onion Fair there was a den of lions, and a Daniel as well. Not the original Daniel. With

an honest candour that did the proprietor credit he admitted that. The modern Daniel was named Day as well, and he was described as the "most infantile lion-tamer that ever appeared in public."

He was produced at the door of the show wiping his hands on the anterior of his little tunic, and covertly sucking sweetstuff; and certainly for a child of his tender years, who was "just about to begin," he looked as undaunted a little hero as could be imagined. I paid my threepence and went in, and shortly afterwards saw him "begin," and still more shortly afterwards wished that he'd leave off. Not on account of the frightful peril he was in. A less eatable-looking boy cannot be conceived. He was arrayed in blue, and covered with indigestible-looking spangles, as though they had been poured over him. But the lions, even though they thought their teeth equal to the task, had no desire to eat him. They didn't want to be bothered with him at all. There was a jolly coke fire in a great brazier not far from the cage, and it was evident that the meat-man had been already round, and peaceful as a pair of old donkeys they were resting their mangy muzzles on their paws, and blinking and winking at the comforting glow. When the young lad stepped into their lair one of the monarchs of the African forest lazily looked round, and, discovering it was only Daniel, betook himself to blinking at the fire again, while the other yawned frightfully, and, raising itself languidly to its feet, resigned itself to be tamed with a docility that must have been re-assuring to the female part of the auditory who, a moment before, had drawn horrible conclusions from the lion's gaping jaws. Lion-taming, like every other difficulty in life, may be accomplished by perseverance; and really there is very little in it—certainly not threepenn'orth when the tamer and the to-be-tamed are in the habit of repeating the performance about fifteen times a day.

The waxworks were much more exciting—more blood-stirring; for there were effigies of departed monarchs that had sat on the English throne, quite as lifelike as the weak-kneed old lions; and there was a chamber of horrors—three chambers in fact, any one of which might be backed to give a visitor the "creeps" in half the time anything Madame

Tussaud has as yet produced. They certainly do go in for everything strong at the Onion Fair. Signor Picketo's wax-work collection was not housed in a vulgar booth, but in a brick-built shop—a tenement that, by good luck, happened to be to let in the very heart of the fair. I am decidedly of opinion that the exhibition, being in a private house, was a great advantage, especially as regards the chamber of horrors. Perhaps, on the other hand, the limited accommodation was somewhat against Signor Picketo's "Kings, Queens, Statesmen, and Warriors," and accounted for nine Kings and Queens holding a *levée* in the kitchen, and for Garibaldi and Mr. Gladstone and Pope Pius IX., and about twelve other persons of eminence, elbowing each other in the shop parlour, and staring in blank dismay at the shameful lack of accommodation. Likewise, if Signor Picketo had been master of the situation, it is likely that he would not have bestowed the Grecian Daughter administering infantile nourishment to her aged parent in a cupboard that still smelt strongly of cheese. But, as before remarked, I believe these little advantages were fully compensated by the manner in which the various rooms of the house enabled the Signor to lay out his horrors—to lay them out literally.

The principal part of the exhibition was on the first floor, which consisted of three rooms, as dingy and gloomy as rooms of a house not long uninhabited invariably are. The front room was in possession of the present Royal Family and King Solomon, and the apartment adjoining was tenanted by modern murderers—an awful assemblage, so closely packed that they jostled each other's decriptive card askew. But the crowning horror was in the further room. As you approached the half-open door you could see a bedstead foot; that was in no way startling. From the position of the chamber it would naturally be used for sleeping in. You put your head in at the door, and then you saw a sight that was enough to make you scream out "Police!" There was a bedstead by the wall just where a bedstead usually stands, and with a bed on it—a bed made with sheets and bolster and pillows, exposing six children, each one with its throat cut in a manner so horrible that the shocked feelings of the beholder were immediately comforted by the reflection that their

death must have been instantaneous. Gore on the little waxen faces, gore on the sheets and on the hands that had been thrown up to protect their tender lives; and there was the murderess—she had left the razor in the windpipe of her last victim—with her throat cut as well, standing upright in her sprinkled nightdress, to welcome you, with a label round her neck that provided the edifying information that "this woman was nurse to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales." It is difficult to describe how appallingly real it all looked. Had the representation been on view at a public show-room it would have been only ridiculous and disgusting; but being in that small room, to which just such a family of youngsters in so poor a house might have retired to rest, it was, from a dramatic and sensational point of view, a perfect success. The women and the young men and their sweethearts crowded round the bedstead, and gauged the depth of every gash with their sorrowful eyes, which in many cases were watery and red. Perhaps this last mentioned fact was due to their recent explorations among the onion groves.

But those and similar horrors which need not be enumerated were not all the curiosities offered for public exhibition by Signor Picketo, at his shop in the Bull Ring. He was possessed of a curiosity, that was not of wax, but that was flesh and blood, and human and alive—a something that, according to the placard in the shop window, "would speak and shake hands with any party as wish to talk with her." It was a terrible sight indeed—a lady who was in part a lioness, and who was regarded so choice a novelty that she was kept quite apart from the rest of the show, and lodged at the top of the house. An extra penny was charged to see the lioness lady, and a young man guarded the foot of the rickety stairway. Ushered into the back attic, bare and empty, save for a form on which the company was to sit, one saw that the open door disclosed a passage, at the end of which was another door, the bright streak at the bottom of which betrayed that there was a light within; and, moreover, there came from that room the civilised sound of the clinking of teaspoons against teacups.

When six visitors had assembled, the young man knocked for the lady-lioness. She came immediately, emerging from

the chamber where the tea-things were, hastily wiping her lips as she came. Her appearance, as she came and stood before us, was startling. Comely of shape, and attired in white muslin, and with her magnificent hair streaming over her shoulders, she seemed not so awful. But then her face. There was the lioness. Her broad forehead was covered with a tawny-coloured horny skin, and it was wrinkled like that of the lion; her eyebrows were shaggy, and one side of her nose was just as is the lion's nose, the other nostril being white, and small and delicate. Both her cheeks were covered with coarse straight hair. It would not have been in the least surprising if she had roared her displeasure at being interrupted while at her tea; but, on the contrary, after having, in a mild and gentle voice, bid us "Good evening," she civilly proceeded to inform us that she was born in Graham's Town, in Southern Africa, in the year 1846; that her father was a soldier in the 86th Regiment, and that during the Kaffir war, and before she was born, her mother was taken prisoner; and that the kraal in which she was lodged was attacked by a lion, which nearly succeeded in carrying her off. Thus she accounted for her leonine appearance, further assuring us that she was very happy under Signor Picketo's protection, and that he permitted her to sell little books of her history, which were one penny each. After this the lioness lady gracefully curtsied, and I have no doubt sought once more the social teapot.

AN AMATEUR COMIC SINGING MATCH.

"An Amateur Comic Singing Match" is a friendly vocal contest, open to all comers on payment of a small entrance fee, and for the champion a prize, and, perhaps, a certificate of merit, such a one as would be of substantial use to him in the event of his being urged by daring ambition to take to real business on the music hall stage. The notion was not only original, but possessed all the elements that bespeak the generous soul, and, at the same time, the perfectly undimmed vision in the direction of personal profit. It was a clever conception, yet one the growth of which in such a mind can scarcely be regarded as miraculous. A hundred times, at least, must the enterprising gentleman in question have gazed with pride and sweet content on the crowd of intellectual faces directed in ecstacy towards some great and inimitable artist, and have observed the rapture with which, on the instant, every twitching mouth leaped, as it were, to meet the chorus to that popular and classical composition, "The Bloke Wot Deals in Tripe." He must have marked the facial contortions in which they, all unaware and involuntarily, followed the singer's performances—contortions that were the exact counterpart of those which were made by the "Bloke" himself, and in which indeed lay his chief talent and claim on public support. It must have been evident to the proprietor's observant eye that there were scores of young fellows, his constant patrons, who possessed in all probability as fine a mental capacity as those stars of their adoration, Funny Finch and the Nobby Coster, and who yearned for an opportunity to show themselves worthy disciples of those great teachers.

This was one view of the case; but there was at least one other. Your Funny Finches and your Nobby Costers, however transcedent they may be as vocalists, are, after all, but men, and possess the weakness that prompts ordinary mortals

to make the most of their opportunities. Genius is apt to exalt its value. It might tend to check the exorbitant expectations of the Funny Finch and the Nobby Costermonger as regards salary, if they were made to understand that a movement was afoot, the prime motive of which was the cultivation and encouragement of "stars" in embryo. At least such a measure was calculated to put the celebrities on their mettle. Indeed, there is no telling to what extent we are, through this last-mentioned consideration, indebted for the almost inexhaustible number of brilliant and exquisitely humorous vocal compositions that are nightly listened to with boundless applause at the dozen or so of music halls that at once elevate and adorn our Metropolis.

To return, however, to the amateur comic singing match. The experiment had been tried before, and with such a result as left no room for doubt regarding its success on the present occasion. The number of aspirants was limited to ten. The prize was a silver cup, appropriately engraved with words descriptive of the noble cause in which it was won. There was to be a fair field and no favour. No names were to be announced. The competitors were to be simply led to the footlights, and there left to settle the matter with the audience, from whose final judgement there was to be no appeal.

It was an exciting scene. The hall was crowded from pit to gallery, for the nameless ones were far from friendless. 'Twas a sight to be witnessed by those sceptics who deny the existence of modern chivalry. There was the field on which the battle was to be fought, and though the combatants were not yet in sight (indeed the niggers were "on" just at the moment), it was well known where they were; the eagle glances of maidens were intently fixed on the envious screen that hid them, and an anxious pallor, such as the cheapest cigars sold at the establishment could not produce, overspread the visages of the youths and young men assembled.

That they might perfectly understand the sort of thing that was expected of them, a "Star Comique," of such renown that he drives no fewer that three ponies in his carriage, led off with one of his latest and best approved melodies. The flashes of wit it contained were absolutely blinding. It was quite in the new and highly relished style of music hall song,

which is so different from that wearisome adherence to simple fun and common sense that characterised the ditties sung at old Vauxhall and other stupid places. The song with which the "Star Comique" favoured the auditory was all about a hungry man, who, try what he might, could never lull his voracious appetite. The applause that greeted each succeeding verse was almost deafening—quite so, in fact, when the singer arrived at the last stanza; and who can wonder? It would have been disheartening indeed if such an adequate rendering of wit and humour had passed unappreciated. Clutching the fore part of trousers with his hands, and planting his hat well on the back of his head, the delineator of modern comic song chanted—

> "I've tried German sausage and sprats boiled in ale
> Linseed-meal poultice and puppy dogs' tail,
> Stewed gutta percha (which pained my old throttle),
> Sourkrout, ozokerit, and soap—brown and mottle."

And yet our French neighbours accuse us of being stolid and phlegmatic! Hark to the clapping of hands and the shrill laughter and the inexorable shouts of "Hongkoor!" "Hencore!" "Ankore!" that pursue the hungry man as, with a final and masterly clutch at the bagginess of his trousers, he looks over his shoulder, and bows himself off, and by it judge whether we are or not a people alive to mirth and drollery, when they are of a sort that tickles our peculiar sensibilities.

It is doubtful whether that crowded audience would have let the Great Macvance off without another song had not the chairman, waving a sugar-crusher, invoked silence, and announced that the amateur contest was about to commence. The curtain was raised, and the ten were disclosed to view. They sat on chairs in a row. It was at once evident that the majority had each fixed on some music hall celebrity as his model. These were to be seen faithfully reproduced the closely-fitting unmentionables and patent boots that invariably distinguish Funny Finch, the curly-brimmed hat of Rum Little Bags, the corduroy "smalls," and velveteen jacket with pearl buttons, without which it would be utterly impossible for that immensely popular singer, Lanky Wiffles, effectually

to render those delectable ballads that have earned for him so enviable a reputation.

In order to promote perfect fairness, and to avoid any undue advantage that one competitor might gain over the rest by studious and exclusive attention to any single song, the titles of ten well-known and favourite music-hall compositions were placed in a bag, and the amateurs themselves dipped for them, taking their chance as to the song that should fall to their share. Amid breathless silence the conductor announced that "No. 1" would sing a song written and composed by the inimitable Cranky Howler, entitled "After Dark."

At the time I was disposed to think that No. 1 could not be congratulated on his good luck at the lottery-bag. It might be all very well for Cranky Howler. A man occupying his splendid position need not be trammelled by the rotten ropes of stage decorum that still are endured at music-halls. He could with impunity recite his after dark "chaff with the gals," and give full vent to his unapproachable imitation of the drunken swell's Haymarket war-whoop. But, in the hands of an amateur, "After Dark" is a tame affair. Divested of its idiotic tags and trimmings that are made to eke out a wretched attempt at rhyme, all that remains is the admirable sentiment that, because the pastimes of street-lamp-smashing, and knocker-wrenching, and police-assaulting, and drunkenness, and bestiality generally may be indulged with greater impunity after dark than before, these were so many prime reasons why all choice spirits should choose the nocturnal season before any other. The applause that waited on the singer was at least equal to his merit; but, as it was generously accompanied by the derisive groans and hisses of the numerous friends of the yet untried nine, No. 1, as he retired, must have felt somewhat less confident than when he stepped forward of securing the "magnificent silver goblet" that was to be the victor's reward.

No. 2 was more fortunate in the song that chance allotted him. Satisfaction beamed in his eyes, and, even before the chairman had announced what was coming, the confident amateur had already tilted his hat over his right eye, and winked at the audience with his left, and laid his forefinger

along the side of his nose—by all of which tokens the experienced crowd before him were made aware that something highly relishing might be expected. The most amazing part of the affair was that they appeared well satisfied. It was a repetition of No. 1, with embellishments. It was all about a "swell" who, having got drunk on champagne, "fell in love" with a young lady who kept a pickled whelk stall, and who, after a flirtation most graphically and minutely described, jilted the "swell" and ran off with "a cove wot hawked hearthstone." This was the pith of the story; but the story was nothing—the dressing was the thing. It is not too much to say that every other line contained either an indecent allusion or some scrap of disgusting slang. It had not the least claim in the world to be called a song; its theme was merely a hook on which to hang tit-bits of the sort of carrion that Lord Campbell's Act was intended to put beyond the reach of those whose vitiated taste gave them a hankering for it. Nevertheless, it was uproariously received, I doubt if more general satisfaction was evinced (excepting, of course, among the friends of the yet untried eight) when the "Star Comique" himself nearly convulsed his auditory by singing of his hungry man who fed on linseed meal poultice and puppy dogs' tail.

But I need not wade through the odious slough out of which the remainder of the amateur competitors fished each for his dainty dish to set before those who were to judge of his good taste and talent. I soon found reason to alter my opinion as to the indifferent luck of No. 1. His song was simply brainless rubbish, without point or aim; but it was not so with the others. Every song sung was at once recognised as a well-known composition; indeed, it was but to be expected that on such an occasion such only would be selected. It is not much to say that, excepting the first, of which the reader may form his own opinion, not one was free from indecent allusion, or gross impudence, or odious vulgarity. The gentleman who won the prize—and it was voted to him by general acclamation—had the good fortune to get hold of a song the chorus to which was, of course, irresistible. It was—

"Squeedge me, Joe! squeedge me, Joe!
It's orful jolly, and that you know.
Squeedge me, Joe! squeedge me, Joe!
And, if you love me, say so."

I dare not print what comes before the chorus, nor could I if it were desirable, describe the delicate gestures with which the singer illustrated his neatest points. I will only say that, after a double final round of "Squeedge me, Joe!" the storm of applause that followed left it no longer in doubt who had earned the magnificent silver goblet.

A TRAMP TO THE "DERBY."

It had struck eight, and daylight was waning, when I, not altogether an inexperienced tramp, buttoned my rough coat of long service, and pulling my cap well over my ears—for the night was chilly—lit my pipe, and struck into the road. There was no lack of company—Epsom bound. There came along the road, with their faces Epsomward, men in twos and threes, with bulky bundles enveloped in coloured pocket handkerchiefs, out of holes in which protruded tiny legs and arms; but they might trudge on for me.

It was all very fine their hopeful way of stepping out, and their cheerful talk, and the prodigal way in which they puffed at clean short pipes, filled and lit at the public-house where a few minutes since they had halted to have just one last half pint a-piece, before they settled down to their night's tramp; it was all very well at present, but it wouldn't last. They were "little doll" men; poor deluded wretches, three of thrice as many hundred who, quite new to the Epsom game, had "heard" that little dolls were the best "spec" out. They were to be bought at Houndsditch at the rate of twopence a dozen, and had been known to realise as much as a shilling for six, from merry gents in drags and open barouches, who wore them with their indecent legs stuck all round their white hats or in the button-holes of their coats. Why, at that rate, eighteen-penn'orth of stock might be the means of putting eight or ten shillings in their pockets even after they had paid the eighteenpence railway fare for riding home. Truly, it "might" be the means; but assuredly it will not be. You will find out your mistake, men of the indecent dolls, before you reach Wimbledon Common. You will be dismayed to overtake and be overtaken by troops of deluded ones, who each carry a bird's-eye bundle, and each believe that he is one of the sagacious few who are alive to the "doll trick." Dismallest of mistakes! By this time to-morrow tiny dolls will be as dead

a drug in the market as the beaten favourite, and scores of disappointed would-be vendors may be found in Epsom town willing to sell you as many little dolls for the price of a few mouthfuls of bread as there are sticks of firewood in a half-penny bundle, and who will not be able to effect one single sale, even at that rate. Then they will fag back to London about Thursday noon, hungry and footsore, still hugging the detested and undiminished bundle, out of the holes in which the little dolls kick their impudent heels as though in mockery and derision.

Here, next in the march, is a troop of ragged, shoeless, boot-cleaning boys, balancing their black-box and brushes on their heads. Then a truck-load of ginger beer, hauled along by two sweating fellows, one pushing and one pulling, and both panting with fatigue and heat, although there is yet at least fifteen miles of hilly road before them. Here comes a barrow loaded with pieces of fried fish, two hundred-weight or so, covered over with a tarpaulin, and after being dragged through the dust all night, it will be vended on the Downs to-morrow under the blazing sun.

Following the fried-fish barrow are two organ-men; two of the detested race of grinders, straight from Saffron Hill, with their instruments of torture burdening their broad backs, and Epsom-bound by token of their trousers being turned up at the boots, to secure the cherished corduroy against chafing in the dust, and by their organs being temporarily divested of their handles. What on earth have put it into the heads of these two benighted Italians that they will be welcome, or even tolerated, on Epsom Downs to-morrow; or that they will have a chance of picking up money enough to compensate them for all their toil and tramping? But one of the inexplicable peculiarities of the organ-grinding animal is, that he is altogether unconscious that he is a nuisance. He believes in his music, and regards it as a pleasure as well as a business, and I have no doubt carries it home and grinds operatic and music-hall melodies to solace his family on days when he has had bad luck and there is no supper. I have a right to assume this to be the case, for once when I attended a select concert and ball held in the aristocratic region of Back Hill, near Liquorpond Street, and to which no one but grinders

and their particular friends were admitted, to my great astonishment the musicians of the evening were two organ-men, perched on a tub, in a corner of the room, who, skipping the inappropriate tunes, ground out waltzes and jigs to the hearts' content of all assembled.

Four children—three girls and a boy—with a few dozen boxes of fusees tucked under their rags, run alongside five brutes in human form, with broken noses and puffy eyes, one of whom carries a bag, in which are the tools of their craft—the boxing-gloves with which, between the races, they will demonstrate the noble art of self-defence.

Here comes a man bearing a pail, along with two others, who apparently carry nothing at all, and yet that they are Epsom bound is evident from the fact that one has an old woollen comforter round his throat as a precaution against night air, while the other has the sole of his boot tied to the upper leather with a bit of string, and both have walking-sticks. What on earth can three men be going to do at Epsom with only one pail between them? Clearly it is time, too, I was on the tramp. Travellers on the road soon make acquaintance. What was my lay? It was the man that had tied his boot up with string who asked this, and thereby gave me an opportunity of establishing a chumship.

"What's my lay? I'll bet you a pot of beer you don't guess it in three times."

"Done," said the man with the crippled blucher; "you're a 'pus palmer.'" It was my design to plead guilty to the first "lay" I was accused of, but, as I had not the least notion what a "pus palmer" might be, and I should surely lay myself open to ignominious detection as an impostor if I was pressed on the subject, I declined the mysterious impeachment.

"Then you're a bettin'-list cove; holds the humberreller, or something in that line."

There was less danger here. I knew what a betting-list was, and any "cove" might hold an umbrella; so I was fain to admit that I had lost, and at the very next public-house we came to we drank luck to each other over a pot of beer—nay, two pots—and, replenishing our pipes, took to the road again.

To my disappointment, however, I presently found that the mystery of the pail was a very shallow one. Indeed, it was no mystery at all; it was simply a delusion. The victim of the washhouse utensil—in which, by the bye, were bestowed some slices of bread and butter, wrapped in a clean cloth, furnished him, as he confided to me, by his old woman to help him on the road—had been told or had read of splendid strokes of business done by enterprising individuals possessed of a pail on Derby-day at Epsom.

"They'd give anything for a pail of water for their horses sometimes," said he; "it's more precious than champagne up in that dry part when the sun's blazing down. I've heard tell of as much as a guinea being give for a pail of water for horses by gents wot's won and are flush of money; half-a-crown for a pailful of water is quite common." And he hitched up the vessel at his back with a wink of confidence; and I feel sure that if anyone there and then had offered him a contract to supply water all day to-morrow on Epsom Downs at the rate of eighteenpence a pailful he would have indignantly spurned the idea.

There was no chance, however, of his obtaining such a bid from either of his present companions—assuredly not from the one on my right, an old man who walked with a limp, and whose hands were knarled and knotted and of the colour of cobbler's wax, and who wore about his throat the old woollen comforter before-mentioned. When the pail-bearer talked so bravely, the old man nudged me and gave me a side glance, in which was expressed much pity for the deluded one, accompanied, however, by a warning shake of the head, adjuring me not on any account to speak my mind, and so blight the poor fellow's innocent expectations.

"And why didn't *you* bring a pail?" I asked of the old man, wondering what he *had* brought, and curious to ascertain.

"Because I couldn't see after two things at the same time," replied the old fellow cheerily: "*my* game's 'string.'"

He looked, albeit his woeful shabbiness, such an inoffensive old man that I could not for a moment suspect him of designs that were very iniquitous; yet I must confess that for the

time his answer made me feel somewhat uncomfortable. The only games of "string" I had ever heard of were those connected with old Bailey gallows exhibitions and Thuggism.

"String!" I repeated, with an uncomfortable feeling that the ignorance I was exhibiting was altogether unworthy of of an "umbrella cove." "How do you work it?"

"What's easier?" returned the mild old gentleman, withdrawing from his coat-tail pocket, as he spoke, a bunch of tangled string and a piece of cord, and a harness maker's awl; "it don't want much working; half way up the hill is the place to be on the look-out, just by that steep bit where the elder trees grow; that's the bit that tells on the weak part of a harness. Snap goes a saddle-girth or a breeching, and then there's a crowd, and it's 'Who's got a bit of string?' Why, I've got a bit of string, and I've got a awl; and there you are in two two's, as right as though nothing had happened, and I've earned, perhaps, a shilling. Ah!" continued the ancient harness-mender, with a hopeful wag of his head, "I've seen and talked with a man who once got a sovereign for one of his old braces on that very spot." Hearing this the tramp with the pail nudged me with his elbow, and raised his eyebrows in commiseration for a man who was so weak as to pursue shadows, and who, undoubtedly, would discover his mistake before he was many hours older.

Instructive as were these revelations, it would be mere affectation to pretend that they had an enlivening effect on my spirits. I can say the same for our friend with the tied-up blucher boot, who audibly growled an opinion that the two old gentlemen were a couple of unheavenly old muffs, and that it was sickening to hear 'em. He was a tall, straight-backed, young fellow of five and twenty or thereabouts, and he puffed spitefully at his short pipe as he slouched along, with his hands in his dilapidated trousers' pockets, while a dare-devil and defiant scowl added to the repulsive expression of his evil-looking face. At present he had not opened his mouth except to swear concerning a "raw" on his foot, and to spit, and so we trudged on until it grew so dark that we could barely see the dust in the road.

"We shall have a dry walk after all," remarked the old

gentleman, whose game was string, "and I was afeared for it this morning."

"Ah! we shall have a dry walk, please God," returned the tramp with the pail. But this was more than the young fellow with the "raw" could stand.

"Please the devil!" he ejaculated, taking the short pipe from his mouth to say so, with such fierce energy that the red-hot ashes in it were scattered in the road. "I've happened on nice company, I have! What do you say, Humbereller?"

Thus appealed to, I replied that I had not said anything.

"Then I'll have a say," he exclaimed, savagely; "I'll say as I said before, please the devil. *I'd* please him fast enough if he'd only give me the chance. On'y let him give me the chance that I'm lookin' for—that rattling good chance that 'ud make my fortune and the fortune of ten others, if they would on'y trust me. Three years ago I come down this road, not with a raw on my foot and without a mag in my pocket, but in a drag that I paid a hundred and twenty quid for, coin down, and as good a bit of horseflesh as ever wore silver harness. I did; I come down with the best, and with them as wouldn't let me brush their coats now, if I asked 'em for the job; and yet lookye here! if I could only find that rattling chance I am speaking of, I might be up in my drag again, with swell togs and a veil to my white hat, and my hamper with the swell grub and the champagne, and all the jolly kit. It's true, if I could only find the rattling chance, mind you! Please the devil, it may turn up some day."

I was conscious from his manner of pressing against me, that the sanguine person who hoped to make his fortune out of a pail of water was shrinking away from the young man, who, having concluded his fierce address, was snorting and spitting at a terrific rate. Being farthest from him, the meek old harness-maker ventured on a remark,

"Are you going to Epsom now to see if you can find the chance you are speaking of?"

"I ain't such an infernal fool," returned our alarming friend, with a laugh. "I should no more think of looking for it to-morrow than I should think of goin' a nestin' after a

bird that I saw flying away with a bit of hay in its beak. The nest would have to be built and the eggs laid before you might think of hatching. Golden eggs and diamond chicks, yah! talk to *me* about your bits of string, and your pails, and your betting-list fakements. I feel like a wulture keeping company along with tomtits when I think on it."

We were so unworthy of his companionship that, with a snort of contempt, he stalked ahead of us, and we thought—the man with the pail whispered that it was a precious good job, too—that he was bent on seeking more congenial company; but he walked by himself for no more than a hundred yards or so, and then he halted until we came up.

"*You* ain't a fool, betting-list cove," he exclaimed, fiercely addressing me; "you couldn't follow your little game if you was. Come and walk this side."

I humbly did as requested.

"I say," said he—we were out of earshot of the other two—"I say, your a wide-awake cove, I should reckon, by the cut of your jib. What did you make out of what I was saying just now?"

"Nothing at all," I replied; which was strictly true.

"You didn't get a hint out of it?"

"Not in the least."

He laughed and hugged himself in his tattered old reefing-jacket.

"And yet you're a bettin'-list cove—a cove that must be acquainted with half a dozen of them that are of just the kidney I should like to get hold of. The very thought of it is enough to make a fellow cut his throat."

His sudden despondency was such that, in sheer compassion, I produced from my pocket a glass bottle, with about half a pint of good French brandy in it.

"Take a sip at this," I said. Without so much a "Thanky" he took it, and drawing the cork out with his teeth, smelt at the bottle's contents. In about five seconds the half-pint was reduced to a tablespoonful, which he handed back to me. I can't say how it happened; perhaps he hadn't tasted solid food for several hours; and this, coupled with the fact that he had taken two deep draughts out of two pots of beer a short time before, may have accounted for it; but so it came

about that he said not a word for at least ten minutes after he had swigged my brandy, and when he did speak it was in the tone of a man who was drunk.

"Give us your hand," said he. "Now say that you'll get me the job if you like the plan, and it ever comes to being a job, and I'll tell you something."

I declined to bind myself on the terms suggested, and told him he could please himself about telling me his secrets.

"But you won't blab?"

"No; I won't blab."

"Very well. Lookye here; I'm a man that's willin' to do my twelvemonths' hard labour for a thousand pounds." He brought his brandied breath close to my ear as he disclosed this astounding fact in a whisper, and squeezed my hand which he still held in his, as though to check any exclamation of amazement I might be betrayed into making.

"And d'ye know what I'm willin' to do twelvemonths' hard labour for?" he continued, presently.

I did not.

"I'm ready and willin' to do it for the sum named—made right and tight for me when I come out, mind yer, and no gammon—*for shootin' a horse.* Lookye here!"—we had loitered so that the two old tramps with the pail and string at this moment came up to us, but a volley of oaths from my confidential friend drove them to the other side of the road.—"Lookye here!" he continued, when they were far enough off: "I've reckoned it up, and it's as easy as can be. Let somebody take me in hand—bettin' coves with money, I mean. If one ain't enough, let three or four of 'em go in Co. and do it. Let 'em take me in hand and arrange, and then go and lay any amount—it don't matter how much—hundreds of thousands if they like—agin the horse that's the favourite, and I'll be there on the race-day and on the spot, and I'll put a bullet behind the favourite's ear and drop him as he runs. I'm a dead shot, and I could do it as easy as kiss my hand, with either rifle or pistol; and I'm ready to do it on them there terms, and do twelvemonths' hard labour for it."

He brought his confidential communication to an abrupt conclusion, and for a few moments the nature of it so amazed me that we tramped on a bit in silence.

"Well," said he presently, and with his voice growing huskier, "what do you say?"

"I'll consider over it," I answered, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Come, consider over it now, then," he rejoined, spying a green bank by the roadside, and making a tipsy clutch at me, partly to save himself from stumbling and partly to drag me to the bank. "Come and sit down along o' me, and we'll consider it out, and arrange it afore we go another step."

But I avoided his grasp, and he staggered to the bank by himself, and trying to sit down on it, tilted over, and lay on his back. I did not help him up, although he swore in a variety of oaths how he would serve me if I did not. I had had enough of him, and, leaving him howling, tramped on to overtake my comrades of the pail and string.

I have already taken note of a certain barrow-load of fried fish, covered over with a tarpaulin, which two industrious fellows were hauling along, pushing, and pulling, and finding it terrible hard work. Likewise mention has been made of a gang of five young gentleman, professional boxers, who were bound for Epsom, carrying with them the tools of their craft. In a secluded spot we found that the former had suffered considerably at the hands of the latter. According to the almost tearful account of the poor fishmongers, the five gallant members of the P.R., sniffing the fried fish, it would seem, and on that account bent on picking a quarrel, had insisted on the already over-taxed barrow-men adding to their load the sack in which the boxing-gloves, etc., were stored.

This unreasonable request was not unnaturally objected to, on which, as punishment for their insolence, two of the P.R. gentry punched the heads of the fishmen, while the other three whipped off the tarpaulin and possessed themselves each of as much as he could carry in his arms, and decamped with it to a neighbouring field; and there the villains, all five of them, sat perched on a rail like carrion crows, yelling laughter and oaths, and ravenously devouring their plunder. But there was no help for it. Of course there were no policemen about, and there could be no doubt that the five young gentleman would keep their word as

regards the smashing and gouging that should be visited on any one who dared approach them. My comrade, the valiant old harness-maker, proffered his willingness to "make one" to do it, and I hope that the umbrella cove was not such a coward but that he would have made another; other passing tramps, however, had their own business to mind, and there was nothing left but to advise the fishmongers to push on, and avoid another visit from the robbers. And so they took our advice, and we kept them company, assisting them with an occasional push up, till, at about a quarter to one in the morning, Epsom town was reached.

Epsom town, but not the end of the tramps' weary journeying. Tramps whose destination is the race-course may not tarry in Epsom town even for a few hours' rest. To be sure there may be reason in this arrangement. Epsom town is not responsible for Epsom race-course, and it would be somewhat hard if the peace-loving inhabitants were doomed once a year to be neighbourly for three or four days with the squalor and dregs of metropolitan society. It would by no means add to the value of house property there were it understood that, in the springtime of every year, just when the fruit and flower gardens attached to the villas were at their gayest and sweetest, there was a possibility of their being taken possession of, and mayhap stripped and trampled over by a ruthless crew from the vilest slums of London. Still it does seem cruelly hard that, having so far completed their pilgrimage, these poor wretches, with twenty miles of travel-stain scored on them, with their tired feet feeling like lead, and their eyes almost as heavy for want of sleep, should be allowed no halt at Epsom. They must "move on." They must retreat or advance, for the town, which is most vigilantly officered by police, will allow them no alternative.

Rather early on the morrow—on Derby morning, that is to say—curious to discover how my two old gentlemen had fared, I mounted the hill of chalk, and approached the Downs and the Grand Stand, from the summit of which there mingled with the mist much smoke from chimney-pots, showing that, down in the depths of the enormous

kitchen, quarters of lamb by the score, and chickens and ducklings by the hundred, and giant joints of beef were still revolving on the spits in preparation for the demands of the hungry host who would in a few hours, clamour for sustenance. Fires were burning in other places; but they were of a much humbler sort—those that crackled under the slung pots of the gipsies; and naked swarms of the juvenile members of the tribe, having crawled out of the filthy canvas lairs in which they roost, crouched round about them, eager for the time of kettle-boiling and breakfast.

But of those who had lodged on the Downs through the preceding night all were not early risers. There were scores —hundreds, I may say, and still be fairly within the mark —who seemed to have arrived so far in the dark; and, casting hopelessly about for anything in the shape of shelter, just dropped down as does a sheep or a cow—with this difference, that the cow or the sheep does compose itself for rest decently, while the worn-out tramp does not. But it is only the adult males, the young tramps and the old tramps, who lie about so. There are scores of women cadgers and fusee sellers; but they huddle together against the wooden walls of the tall Grand Stand, that in a few hours will bloom like a prodigious bouquet and flash in the sun, all so rich and gay, as though there were no such things as poverty and rags and hunger in the world. They cluster together, those wretched women, some with babes at their breasts, and others with children of tender years gathering in under their old shawls and draggletail gowns, in some such manner as a hen gathers her chicks, but far less effectually and warmly; and here they will remain, like paupers gathered about the doors of a workhouse casual ward, until such time as the business of the day begins to stir, and the active police, who have lodged at the Grand Stand, and who have breakfasted, and are smart and fresh and fit for duty, bid them "clear out," and they are absorbed in the gathering crowd.

At present, however—half-past six a.m.—there is no crowd nor any sign of one. There is business doing, however. The proprietors of the countless booths that are ranged in rows on both sides of the race-course are up and busy, though as yet they do not deem it worth their while to throw open

their canvas doors and expose the tempting wealth of eatables within. This is sufficient precaution by day, but at night-time stronger protective measures have to be adopted. There is not a refreshment-booth keeper on Epsom Downs that is not provided with firearms; and any thief who should thrust his curious head in after the proprietor was supposed to have retired for the night would, in all probability, find it promptly and solidly rapped by some sturdy watchman who keeps guard just within the flimsy rag that serves as a door. But booth robberies on the Downs are seldom heard of. It is not as though the hundreds of poverty-stricken and famished ones who are spread about the neighbourhood were alert and lively. By the time they tramp from London and mount the hill, they are so utterly done up, that not even the sharp spur of hunger is sufficient to goad them to petty larceny for the stomach's sake.

I looked about in vain for some time for my comrades of the road, the hero of the pail, and he who had come to Epsom to fish for fortune with no more promising bait than a bunch of bits of string and a bradawl. At last I found the latter. Decent old fellow he was, he had had no breakfast, and was without even a penny to buy him a cup of coffee; but when I discovered him he was in the hands of the travelling barber, who had him between his knees on the grass already lathered for shaving. The charge was three halfpence, and this was the exact sum, with not a farthing over, that the stout-hearted old chap possessed: but he let it go without a pang, in order that he might appear respectable at that lucky spot on the slant of the hill, where on a memorable occasion, the man had sold one of his braces for a guinea, to patch up a broken-down harness. I made inquiries for the man with the pail, and was informed by the other old fellow, as he wiped his clean shaven jaws, and winked at me over the edge of the towel, that it had turned out just as he expected it would—he had ascertained that there were dozens of men with pails beside himself already on the spot, and that he had discreetly parted with the vessel in which he had placed such trust for the sum of tenpence, and was at that moment tramping back to London.

INFANT PAUPERS.

HAVING in view its future welfare, it is doubtful if much worse can be done for a destitute or deserted child of either sex than to consign it to a workhouse—there to be educated, maintained and trained until such time as it arrives at an age such as makes it eligible for the labour market. The system is objectionable from whatever point of view it may be regarded, and whatever condition of the child concerned. Should the poor little waif be the offspring of depraved parents, and familiarised from its earliest infancy with all it should have been taught to shun, the workhouse or its branch connection, the pauper school, provides but an indifferent reformatory. The alley-bred brat instinctively seeks congenial companionship, and amongst the hundreds besides himself the establishment accommodates, he is not long at a loss; and contributes his quota of contamination to the common sink, drawing freely on the same for a practical knowledge of vices with which he at present has but a limited acquaintance. However admirable the supervision may be, it is next to impossible to avoid this where children herd together in droves as it were, having a common playground, and the dormitories fitted with scores of bedsteads. Should the small unfortunate, doomed to a future of pauperism come of decent parents—and such instances are far from rare—be a stranger to the arts and subtleteir of juvenile wickedness, it is downright cruelty and worse to compel the helpless little creature to consort with companions who will speedily make him as bad as themselves.

Nor is this, serious though it be, the only disadvantage of parochial fostering is generally adopted. It is a fact, painful as it is undeniable, that boys and girls workhouse bred differ strangely in habit and demeanour from ordinary children. Wherever they are seen, at play, at school, out walking, or at meals, they seem to be oblivious of life's sunny side. They

droop at the neck and keep their eyes downward, as though to them the sky were always leaden, and it were hopeless to look up at it, and they shrug their narrow shoulders beneath their coarse grey jackets in a cold and uncomfortable manner, as though, whichever way the wind might blow for other folk, for them it was always due east. However buoyantly disposed by nature, in a workhouse atmosphere they speedily lose their lightheartedness, and to all appearance grow moodily resigned to what they are powerless to struggle against. Nor is this unaccountable. For the healthful development of its mind a child requires to be taken not only by the hand but by the heart as well, by some one it can love and trust, and on whom it can surely rely for sympathy and comfort at all times and seasons—some one to whom it can confide its small troubles and failures, and who is always ready with a kindly word of encouragement. It is this that, at all events, the majority of children shut away from the world in a manner indicated miss and pine for. It is a want which not even the most benovolent system of workhouse management can supply, and which amidst a flock of black sheep and white, were best not attempted, as it will only lead to suspicion of favouritism and increased discontent.

Then comes the question—and it is by no means a new one—is there any other better method of providing for children who are "thrown on the parish"? There is a method which has been bravely pushing its way for several years past, but concerning the advantages of which boards of guardians are not agreed. Nevertheless, it has received, and is still receiving, an amount of steady encouragement which gives promise of increased success in the future. The philanthropists who have the business in hand style themselves the Committee for Promoting the Boarding Out of Pauper Children, the chairman being Francis Peek, Esq., of the London School Board, and its patrons, amongst others, Earl Shaftesbury and the Bishops of Chester, Ripon, and Exeter. The plan adopted is quite different from the old "farming" mode. The children are placed in carefully selected and respectable homes in country places, usually but one child, and never more than two in each, and the well being of the juveniles is effectually provided for by a

system of irregular visits and personal supervision on the part of certain ladies and gentlemen of the neighbourhood.

The first question that naturally arises is—are there to be found in all parts of the kingdom ladies or gentlemen who will give their good services to this not particularly attractive work? The answer, as furnished by the committee's last report, is that in no single case has such assistance been required and not been cheerfully rendered, and, furthermore, the said committee plainly assert and tender evidence in proof that there are hundreds of homes open to pauper children in all parts of the country of exactly the kind sought for, but that children cannot be got from the guardians to send to them. And this is the more astonishing because the boarding out plan has the strong recommendation of being vastly economical. In the society's last report we read:—"The plan has been adopted with much success by the Leeds guardians. . . The result has been a saving of nearly £70 per week." Nevertheless the system, which has so much to recommend it, progresses but slowly. In the *Contemporary Review* Mr. Peek writes:—"Of 48,000 children over whom the State has control, 4,000 were being trained to a life of pauperism, surrounded with pauper associations and exposed to all the contaminating influences of daily intercourse with bad characters, whilst only 8,000 were otherwise provided for in district schools or by being boarded out in cottage homes."

There is really no reason why this healthful system of transplanting should not be more generally adopted. Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Bath, Carlisle, Warwick, Kendal, Bradford, Gloucester, and several other important towns have tried it, and are well satisfied with the result, and it it is only fair to assume that what is pleasant and profitable for Leeds and Liverpool would not fail to be so for all other parts of the country. The wholesale system of housing and training, more particularly as regards girls, is to be deplored. Girls are shrewder than boys, and more easily accommodate themselves to circumstances. It may well happen that the superintendent of an institution may refer with just pride to the fact that her youthful charges are obedient, docile and intelligent, and that the

domestic economy of the establishment is in its working as trustworthy as the action of a well-made machine. Indeed, much stress is laid on the prime governing principle of strict and undeviating "method." Every girl knows exactly what her work is, and the system is so perfect that it clashes with no other girl's work, and the end is that the domestic manœuvres of the day are accomplished with punctuality and precision, and almost as if they were the work of a single pair of hands.

But this is just where the fault lies. During a training of this kind, a girl's special capacity is seldom discovered, or if it is, it is rarely inquired into or cared for. Here is a great and complicated piece of machinery, and the girl may be compared with a small wheel or spindle in connection with it, insignificant of itself, but necessary to the satisfactory performance of the whole. Very naturally the girl, finding that no more is expected of her than that she shall do certain things, nay, knowing that she is in danger of punishment for being meddlesome should she, however good-naturedly, overstep the rigid line laid down for her guidance, faithfully does as she is bid, and has not an idea beyond. As a piece of the machine she is, perhaps, all that could be desired; but taken from the machine she is, in a manner of speaking, as useless for the production of edifying results as the isolated wheel or spindle would be. She may be a very good girl, cleanly and willing, and may be highly recommended by the matron, but she will be usually found almost entirely deficent in that knowledge which would make her valuable as a domestic servant. There is, it may be, one thing she can do well, because she has been always used to it. She is an excellent scrubber, for instance; but she has been accustomed to vast plains of flooring for the exercise of her industry, and to long-handled scrubbing brushes, gigantic "swabs," and deluges of water, and when she is reduced to the modest bucket and the small and handy scrubbing-brush, she is almost as cramped for free play as a salmon in a house-cistern, and splashes and flounders as much.

Again, one may have been brought up in the pauper school-kitchen, and prove herself invaluable at the mighty coppers in which soup is made by the hundred gallons, or

she may know all about the baking of beef, scores of stones at a time, in a patent hot-blast oven; she may even be accomplished as a cooker of potatoes by the sack, and by means of the latest really excellent but somewhat complicated "steamer," but give her four pounds-weight of the vegetable and the ordinary culinary utensils of private life, and bid her do her best at the kitchen-grate, and the result, probably, will be anything but a mealy triumph. It may, on the other hand, be urged that a poor girl, brought up in the rural districts, and at the abode of a cottager, would, after all, be at a disadvantage as compared with the youthful female trained at the pauper school, inasmuch as the former has no opportunity of learning ordinary house-servant duties, whilst as regards everything in the shape of cookery, it is notorious that cottagers' fare is, as a rule, execrable. There may be a considerable amount of truth in this, but at the same time it is undeniable that there are in London and elsewhere hundreds of families who prefer as servants, girls from the country, despite their shortcomings, to town-bred young women, whatever may have been the school at which the latter acquired their knowledge; and who take care to make their predilections conspicuous in their advertisements in the daily newspapers.

At all events this much is certain that the popular prejudice against receiving into a household a girl whose connections and experiences since childhood have been confined strictly to the workhouse or its branch establishments is very great. There are, of course, liberal-minded ladies and gentlemen who scorn all such nonsensical whims, and would as soon hire a maid direct from Poplar or Lambeth Union ae from a West-End registry for servants, but in nine cases in ten the young female bred within the brick walls of the parish asylum, and grown old enough to earn her own livelihood is compelled to be content to accept service at establishments where much drudgery and small emoluments are the ruling principle. On the other hand, the girl, whatever she may have been originally, who has for years enjoyed the freedom and the healthful surroundings of cottage life, will experience little difficulty when she is fit and able to take her own part in the world to suit herself to her heart's content.

BABES OF BUSINESS.

After the class of company I have already made the reader acquainted with, he will expect no apology from me for introducing him to that most commonplace and vulgar of persons, the boy of the streets, who may be said to be essentially a creature of twilight. In the narrow alley in which he drew his first breath, so slender a strip of broken oozy pavement parted the double row of tall, smoke-blackened houses, that, except at brief high noon, the beams of the summer sun could never contrive to penetrate deeper than the patched windows of the third or second floor; while during the "short days," for all the chance the benighted alley-dwellers had, of participating in the blessings of broad daylight, they might almost as well have resided, in winter, on the shores of Baffin's Bay.

As regards his rearing; who was his father, and what his occupation? who was his mother—where is she now? What were his prospects of a meal beyond the present one during that period of his utter helplessness, his extreme childhood? To all these questions, the answers must be clothed in vague guessing and dim uncertainty. As for his keen expanding young mind, it pretty much resembled the dingy room, over the unwashed floor of which he crawled until he found the proper use of his tiny legs (which in some sense was a pity, insomuch as he has done small service on his knees ever since); the windows, as it were, of the chamber of his brain being dull with the dirt of neglect, and shrouded with the dingy curtain of ignorance.

The boy of the street will make a vigorous push for existence. He is a gem in his way, a pattern and example that scores and hundreds and thousands of grown men—respectable men, men who hold him in abhorrence, on account of his rags and his impudence (a term that in his case does duty for "indomitable perseverance")—might creditably copy. I

never could understand how the type of humanity here discussed came to be classed with the Arab tribe. The similitude does not hold good, even to skin-deep, since a moderate dressing of soap, and the application of a rough towel, will (except for his creditable weather-beaten face) turn our bonâ-fide boy of the street from brown to white in a very little time. I presume it is to the predatory Arab, to which his romantic friends love to liken him; to the wild, homeless, desert rover; the daring forager, who is honest, so long as he is not hungry; the lawless, lazy appropriator of the goods of honest men. But really, the street-boy answers in the main no more to the description, than you or I, dear reader. He is not a thief from choice, at events; he is not lazy; he is not, because he likes it, a wanderer. He will have a home if he can get one, thankfully enough; and as to his disposition to roam, that is not a pleasure, but his business—his desperately hard and precarious business.

What will not the London street-boy do for a living? I am sure I cannot recollect how many times the discovery of another and still another method schemed and adopted by my ingenious young friend has caused me to utter the wondering admiring exclamation. How often in the future I may find cause to utter it is hard to say. But making every allowance for his splendid talent for picking up a living, giving him full credit for his wonderful economy in utilising the most unpromising material, I am drawn by recent experience to doubt if he has not at last arrived at very nearly the bottom of his bountiful well of invention.

On a dismal, wet, and foggy Sunday evening in winter, I found myself plodding the same road with two wretchedly-clad little boys, in the direction of Highgate and London. Although it was Sunday, I could not help being struck with their business-like air. Occasionally I could hear the chink of copper money; and when, walking behind them, I got a better view of their faces by the light of the road-side lamps, there was so much of hard work done, and very little wages earned, in their shrewd, though jaded, old-fashioned faces, that I could not help speculating in my mind as to what they'd been up to. It couldn't be crossing-sweeping—they had no brooms; besides it was no neighbourhood for "cros-

sings." They were not beggars; for along a mile of road they had halted not once. The shortest way to solve the riddle would be to address them.

"What do you two lads find to do on a Sunday, may I ask?".

"We works," curtly answered the youngest, aged almost nine.

"Work! where?"

"Finchley."

"Work on Sunday at Finchley! What at?"

"Simmitry; don't we, Jack?"

"We do so," Jack responded, ruefully. "'Tain't up to much this 'ere time o' year, though; but you're 'blidged to do it, to keep up the kinnexshon, don't you see?"

"But *who* isn't up to much? Simmitry? Why do you work for him, then?"

The small boy laughed, while Jack scowled, suspicious of "chaff."

"How can a Simmitry be a 'im?" said he; "it's a berryin' place."

A sudden light dawned on me. "Finchley Cemetery, you mean! Why, what on earth do you two work at in Finchley Cemetery?"

"We goes a-numbering. You don't understand? then I'll tell yer. It's a werry large place, don't yer see, and there's a 'ole 'eap of common 'terments, as they calls 'em. It's all werry well for them as has got monuments and tombstones, wot they can make easy tracks for; but it's different among the rough clay. The big uns, they're all alike; and the little uns, they're all alike; and there wouldn't be no telling one from the t'other, 'cept for the numbers wots ticketed on 'em or on the wall, when they lays close along side it. Well, d'ye see, it's on a Sunday mostly that the wisitors comes, as they can't spare the time of a week-day, and they knows the number of the grave wot they've come to have a look at; but they don't know whereabouts it is, and werry glad they are to find me or my mate, or one of the others at the gate ready and willin' for tuppence to take 'em straight to the spot.

"How do we know? Well, d'ye see, we makes a study on it. We takes a turn at slack times, and practices. We ha

a 'apenny bet on sometimes—that sharpens yer! 'I'll lay, I ses to Bill, or Bill ses to me, 'I'll lay yer that I'll take any six yer like to name, and I'll give yer six, and I'll go the round and touch 'em all in less time than you will.' It comes easy enough when you get in the way on it. Did I begin it? Lor' bless yer, no! More did my mate. We fust was put up to it by his young brother, wot used to ply at Ilford Simitry. Do it pay? In the summer-time it do. We're pardeners. We've cleared as much as three-and-six on a Sunday atween us, in that there hot time last summer, when there was such a jolly lot of scarlet fever about. But it's hardly worth trotting after all the way from Clarkinwell, this time o' year; all we got to-day was eightpence atwixt us."

No doubt there is something very dreadful in all this, something terribly shocking in the contemplation of these two coldly calculating, keen old ghouls in pinafores, grubbing a crust from amongst the newly-turned clay-clods of common interments in a public burial place; something incalculably repulsive in their inhuman relish for the "jolly" harvest that the scarlet fever brought them "that hot time, last summer;" but setting the horror of the business aside, how much there remains to admire in nine-year-old Bill, and in Jack, his senior, by eighteen months, or so, on the score of pluck and perseverance! If it were always summer-time, and "three-and-six" might be gained by the juvenile partners, with no more inconvenience than was involved in a stroll from Clerkenwell to Finchley, and then a few hours' pleasant ramble amongst the cemetery trees and flowers, there would not be much to wonder at. But consider the winter season, the cold, the wet, the dreary six miles that lie between the goal and the starting point, the bleak loitering at the inhospitable gate, the dearth of customers, the slushy uncomfortable trudging up and down the lon gchurchyard paths, probably in boots that are no better than a sham and a mockery; and finally the miry walk home through the fog and the rain, with only fourpence earned; and all this with the steady, patient purpose of "keeping up a connexion," that, in the event of nothing better turning up, may be the means of providing a livelihood next summer. Good heavens! how many men would do so much? How many men with health

and strength, and encouraged thereto by observant and admiring friends, do infinitely less for themselves and their families, and are lauded as shining examples of diligence and industry!

I am content to agree that such instances of the London street-boy's energy and self-dependence as that above quoted are exceptional; but regard him in any one of his score of common occupations. Take him as a newsvending boy—as the shoeless, mud-bespattered, policeman-hunted, poor little wretch, who passes a miraculous existence in the road amongst tramping horses and swiftly-revolving wheels that momentarily threaten to crush him; the eager, quick-eyed, ragged-headed sprite, who, with the agility of a monkey or a London sparrow, skips about stand-still omnibuses, this side, that side, and hopping on and off the step behind, ever in danger of a kick from the foot of the exasperated conductor on his monkey-board, all the time keeping up a perpetual clamour, "*Stannard! Telegraft! Eke-ho!* ninth 'dishun, sir!" with a determination to sell that bedews his young visage with perspiration. An Arab is he? Good heavens! imagine an indolent, sun-basking, date-chewing infant of Arabia tearing about at this rate, and bawling his wares till he is hoarse, and elbowing, and pushing, and scuffling in the miry highway hours after dark, so that he may earn an honest penny!

His profits are not tremendous. Supposing a boy take's a dozen *Echoes*, and, bent on business, plunges headlong with them into a crowded thoroughfare—the Strand, for instance—and after a couple of hours' violent exertion of voice and limb, contrives to sell them, his gain is—twopence! Only twopence; but what luxuries does that trifling sum represent in our young friend's hands! It means a fair half of a luscious two-pound loaf, with still a halfpenny left with which to gorge a deep hole, fresh pulled from its crumby interior, with treacle! It means, instead of curling up for the night like a homeless dog in the corner of the stone steps of a doorway, a lodging—a bed, with a warm rug to cover him! And before that humble place of amusement became converted into a temperance music hall the twopence used to mean, with the addition of that other secretly hoarded penny

an entire evening of delight inexpressible in the gallery of the Royal Victoria Theatre over in the New Cut!

"Exactly so," growls the sour curmudgeon, who hates ragged street-boys; "that in all probability is what it *does* mean; and rather than encourage the little vagabonds vicious and depraved taste in such a direction, I would walk a mile to buy my newspaper of a decent shopkeeper." But there you and I, Mr. Curmudgeon, don't agree. Why should not Ragged Bob do as he pleases with his honest earnings as freely as any other man? To be sure, he is but a little man; but you wouldn't deny a dwarf of forty perfect liberty of action because, standing fair on his feet, he could not look over a four-foot rule? What constitutes manhood? Hasn't Bob arrived at "years of discretion?" Good heavens! Keep your eyes on him during his pursuit of business for just a half-hour, and after that doubt the fact if you can. Is he self-dependent! Who will give him a bed to-night, a crust for breakfast to-morrow morning, unless he is able to pay down his hard-earned pence for the one and the other?

Go to the gallery of any theatre to which your threepence will procure your admission, if it please you, Bob. Maybe, it is my private opinion that you might find a more profitable investment for your hardly-gained coppers; that is to say, if *I* had threepence only, I would not part with it for a seat in the gallery of any theatre; but then I must not forget that if I were ever so hard up, I should never muster courage enough to do as you do to keep me from starving. Your constitution is peculiar, Bob; and if experience convinces you that, at times, threepennyworth of this kind of amusement is necessary to its healthful sustenance, it is not for me to contradict you. I sympathise with you, my poor little ragged Robin, most heartily, knowing, as I do, and as every thinking man must, that if, sharpened on the whetstone of hunger and raggedness, your senses are precociously keen for business, you are proportionably alive to the worries and anxieties of business, and that you in silence suffer and hardly endure much more than the respectable world supposes—much more than the many "commissions" that have been instituted to enquire into your con

dition have yet been able to fathom. They should call you as a witness, Ragged Robin; you understand the nature of an oath remarkably well, and are at least intelligent enough to answer straightforward questions. Dear heart, Rob! wouldn't a simple narrative of your experiences make their astonished eyes blink behind their gold-rimmed spectacles.

It must not be supposed, however, that Ragged Bob and his countless host of comrades pin their faith entirely to newspapers. Cigar-lights have a peculiar attraction for them. They are goods that don't spoil, are of small bulk (which is important, in the event of a horse-holding or a luggage job turning up), and the profit on them is rather more than cent. per cent. Not that the possession of capital is absolutely necessary to his getting a living. This has already been shown in the "cemetery" case, and a score of other instances may be adduced. The summer's day is never too long for him; the bleakness of the winter's morning does not daunt him, nor the gloom of its night. He commonly works "double tides" of twilight. He attends the early markets at this time of year many hours before daylight. You will find him in great force at Covent Garden, wide awake while yet the flaring gas-jets show the wholesale "early birds" from the country a light by which to vend their produce; his small feet, pinched and blue with cold, pick their way over the stones in search of a job while the market roofs and the great tarpaulins that cover the carts and wagons are glistening white with hoar-frost.

You find him at Billingsgate. If there is any place in the wide world less attractive than another to an ill-clad half-starved little boy at five o'clock of a winter's morning, it surely must be Billingsgate. Everything is icy. The wet paving-stones webbed with frost and spangled with fish-scales, the icicles that festoon the basket-stacks and the eaves that overhang the salesmen's stalls, the stalls themselves; the salesmen themselves, despite their faces fiery-red as becomes a battle-field whereon frost has long wrestled with rum-and-water; the ghastly stiffened cod, with their wide open eyes and gaping mouths, and which look as though they were only waiting to be thawed in order to freeze the hearer's blood by a narrative of the horrors they had passed through since

they quitted the Dogger-bank—one and all speak of frost-bite and stagnation of blood.

But there is our brave little boy of the streets! This morning, as on every morning, he tumbled out of his bed at four A.M., with no definitely settled plan beyond being off to the market. He will mind your cart or your whip for a half-penny. He will help carry your goods from the auctioneer's rostrum to the vehicle that is to convey them home; he is the willing servant alike of high and low; and having finished a little job for the great Mr. Gills, of Grosvenor Street, he will tuck up the rags of his small trousers out of the mud, and for twopence "push behind" a costermonger's barrow-load of soles and plaice all the way to Whitecross Street.

SPORT AND PASTIME AT THE EAST END.

"BECAUSE you did not find us at the Crystal Palace, and with selfish satisfaction remarked on our absence from the excursion trains which carried hundreds of thousands out of London; because we were unrepresented in the parks and the more popular pleasure gardens; and your museums and picture galleries were not afflicted by our presence, you will not, if you please, assume that we did not keep Bank Holiday. "We," with your highly respectable permission, are the humblest of the humbler class, and thick as bees in a hive we colonise the mazy regions which lie between Whitechapel Church and Limehouse Hole. We are the unconsidered ones of the undercurrents, who eke out a patch and piecemeal existence—goodness knows how. As regards our majority, we are the slaves of the deputy-deputy task-master, whose employer is the gentleman who has the giving out to make of the tens of thousands of suits of male attire for the incredible cheapness of which that eminent firm of slop-tailor merchants —Messrs. Shadrach and Lazarus—are so justly renowned. Likewise, we have in our midst, a liberal sprinkling of wretchedly-paid Irish and German sugar-bakers, and chronically out-of-work weavers, and match-box makers, and coster-mongers, and street hawkers, and male and female market porters, and a very considerable number of those who, when the police inspector on duty at the station-house makes the inquiry, modestly describe themselves as "general dealers." Our homes are squalid and unhealthy, and hundreds of us find the length of even a summer's day entirely too short for our main purpose, which is to keep the wolf from the door, that we work Sundays as well as week days.

But we kept Bank Holiday despite these trifling disadvantages. Perhaps you never heard of our recreation ground? It is down Bow way. It is beatifully secluded, being shut in with factory walls and black pitched pailings, with the

smoke from a score of tall factory chimneys waving playfully in the breeze. It is a place not easy to find by a stranger. Indeed, although it is next to a large public-house, for all that appears to the contrary it might be the entrance to a dust yard or coal depôt. This, as regards ordinary occasions, but the most innocent person could not have made such a mistake had he chanced to come that way on Bank Holiday. Not that there was any outward display in the way of flaming placards or flags and banners. There was but one exterior sign of the exceptional treat in store for us, and that was neatly chalked on the wall, the notice, "Coppers must not be offered, as they won't be took to-day." At other times it does not do to be so particular. Ours is a working population whose business transactions are governed chiefly by a copper medium of currency. This, however, was a day of great events, and the price of admission was sixpence. A silver sixpence, mind; not that amount in coppers. It was a delicate way of intimating to strangers that it must not be concluded because we were not always genteel that we did not know how to be so when occasion demanded.

Our recreation grounds, though perhaps what would be called severely plain, are very commodious. The pastime we are commonly addicted to is walking and running matches. There is a walk of ashes staked off from a wide encircling standing space and a spacious centre, which would be a green were it not the nature of the grass of these parts to come up like bad coloured hay and to ripen into reed-like splinters. That our host's generous programme of amusements is appreciated is sufficiently shown by the fact that by three o'clock in the afternoon we muster, male and female, at least three thousand. We start with a little bicycling, but that is a mere trifle to amuse us while we steady our exuberant spirits for the enjoyment of the prime features of the day's delights, one of which is a three-mile walking match for substantial money prizes, the competitors being six young women of the neigbourhood—a straightforward and *bonâ fide* affair, with the names of all the young ladies duly printed, with the colours they intend to compete in. The first idea was—indeed, it was so announced—that the fair competitors would appear in ordinary professional pedestrian

costume, but (or so it was currently rumoured and indignantly commented on) at the last moment a tyrant police law insisted on petticoats.

The ladies engaged were not to be daunted, however, on this account. They appeared on the track blooming and buxom, attired in clean cotton gowns with ribbons in their hair, and, at crack of pistol, stepped out with a will. The cheers were deafening, for each fair competitor had come accompanied by her numerous male and female relatives, and the shrill ejaculations of excited mothers and sisters, and the deeper and more earnest promptings to Sall to go it, to Emma to put the steam on, and to Mary to show 'em her heels, blended in a Babel of sound that of itself was worth sixpence to listen to. Betting on the event was free, as well as it might be. No one could gaze on each of those six young faces—the youngest about eighteen and the oldest four or five and twenty—and not at a single glance feel convinced that it was the spirit of an Englishwoman that stirred her blood and spurred her to desperate best to be first at the tape in the last lap. As round after round was completed, and then the first, and then the second mile was done, the excitement grew. Brothers and lovers, heedless of the warning voice of the umpires dashed to the track and tendered wet pocket handkerchiefs, bottles of water, nay, measures of liquid still more exhilarating, to the perspiring damsels, and it was good to see the disdain with which they waved off all such artificial aids.

Two young Amazons—the foremost two—had long kept neck and neck. The one, a rufus-headed young creature with a freckled visage, evidently of Irish parentage; the other a fair-haired, blue-eyed little woman, who walked with her elbows squared and her fists clenched, and who bore on her face the quiet smile of one who means to win. There are roars for red, and counter roars for light blue, who trips along with the labouring young Irish woman as coolly as though she had that moment laid down her hair brush at the toilet glass. The young Irish woman is brawny of build, and the increased demand for light blue causes her eyes to glance asquint, and her nostrils to dilate in an ominous manner. The young Irish woman's hair is coming

down, when, with a sweet smile, and as though hurry was out of the question, light blue takes a hair pin from her own neat tresses, and hands it to her opponent. It may have been an act of simple good nature; if it was a stroke of stratagem it was a masterpiece. The muscular young Irishwoman squinted terribly for an instant, and a pale ring encircled her mouth. One blow, and she could have lain light blue lifeless on the ash track! But her noble spirit conquered, and she relieved the Etna of her wrath by tossing the proffered hair-pin to the mob, and by giving utterance to a snatch of defiant air of her native country. This was injudicious, as she had no breath to spare. Anyhow, from that point light blue shot away from her and won easily with twenty yards to spare

While our six young ladies retire to a convenient shed to cool their heated brows and refresh exhausted nature (and permit me to mention it was only the most ill-mannered amongst us who insisted on staring in at the window, and through chinks in the roof and walls, while they were so engaged), we had a race, horse against bicyclist with a real jockey in the saddle. Likewise we had some fancy bicycling, and a young lady splendidly attired in blue satin, who was carried "flying-angel" fashion round the track at the rate of fifteen miles an hour. But somehow we did not seem to care very much for this sort of thing. We are used to nothing but the grimly practical, and we find pleasure in nothing that does not in some way or other come within the scope of our daily experiences. To be clad in blue satin and to ride pickaback on a bicycle rider at the rate of fifteen miles an hour may be all very well in poetry, but what we like is the real. Those who cater for our amusement are well aware of this, and therefore it was that the crowning glory of our entertainment was so cunningly planned.

What was it? Fireworks? Blondin on the slack rope with his wheelbarrow? The Salamander, who smokes a cigar and drinks brandy and water in the midst of a flaming fire? No. Each of these exhibitions—nay, all three combined—would have been regarded as flat and insipid compared with the treat that awaited us. Six market porters in the Borough Market and from Spitalfields, were to compete against each

other in the carrying of empty bushel baskets piled on each other and balanced on top of their heads! It was asserted that as many as twenty empty bushels could be so carried, the carrier raising the mighty wicker column to his head without assistance. There were the baskets, and tremendous was the cheering that greeted the arrival of the porters—real, white smocked, leathern-capped, ankle-jacked porters, straight, as it were, from the market, and breathless was the watching of the assembled thousands while the bushels were being piled and elevated. The wind was against the performers, and over and over again the towering bushel baskets came with a crash on the heads and shoulders of the closely packed spectators, and then what shrieks of laughter rent the air. But all other sounds were as mere whispers compared with the applauding roar that greeted the porter, who, after many essays, managed to stagger round the course, or nearly, with his lofty pile intact.

It was all over then. There was no band to play "God Save the Queen," but the motley audience of three thousand were fully satisfied and took their departure highly delighted, and with the laughter not yet faded from their faces. And yet we are sometimes spoken of as the dangerous classes, as a section of the community grinding and chafing against our miserable lot, and ready at the slightest provocation to rise in rebellion against those who are placed in authority over us! We may not be doves, and there may be a virtue or two we are deficient in, but, if it is any evidence of simple-mindedness to take harmless delight in paying sixpence on a holiday afternoon to see six young women compete in a walking match, and some market porters balancing bushel baskets, it can hardly be denied that we are simple-minded.

A FLIGHT OF GAOL BIRDS.

OVER against the prison, which is one of the most extensive within twelve miles from London, is a public-house, the landlord of which, supposing him to be a man of only commonly keen observation, should be able to speak as to a thief's identity with any gaol warder in the kingdom.

Should it ever become illegal to serve a thief, knowing him to be such, with intoxicating drink, mine host of the "Bull in the Pound" would be driven to the hard necessity of putting up his shutters. The "Bull in the Pound" is a recognised house of call for thieves, both petty and formidable—for burglars, "smashers," shoplifters, garotters, and highwaymen. It is the trysting-place where, after prolonged and painful severance, the at-present-free bird of prey meets and renews loving friendship with the gaol bird clean clipped and perky after his well-cared-for incarceration. The landlord of the "Bull in the Pound" is a highly respectable tradesman. He has not the slightest sympathy with evil doers, and fifty guineas would not tempt him to permit on his premises the hilarious celebration of bold Toby Crackitt's release over a bowl of punch, by a select circle of admiring "magsmen." I have seen the worthy publican in question, and conversed with him, and I feel convinced that even if "thieves' talk" were indulged in aloud before his bar, it would be instantly put a stop to, and the offenders ejected. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the "Bull in the Pound" is a house of call for every type of offender to whom the grated cell and prison are familiar.

I am unable to explain the circumstance, but at the prison facing the "Pound," as at every other, there are a greater number of prisoners discharged on Monday than any other morning—always in the morning and about ten o'clock. Over the discharging of a man from prison there is nothing like the fuss that distinguishes his reception there. In the

first case, the black carriage that conveys him is guarded fore and aft by stalwart policemen; and in the narrow passage within the dismal omnibus which divides the double row of little hutches, each containing a prisoner, is bestowed a third blue coated and helmeted man, who has quick ears for rash scraps of conversation that one captive may venture to indulge in with another. The great outer gate is opened, the vehicle is admitted, and the great gate closed and locked again before the inner gate is opened.

But at a prisoner's discharge, whether he be a grey-haired sinner or some poor little ten-year-old waif, friendless, homeless, and with no other resource but to "go at it again," all this ceremony is quite dispensed with. They are not let loose, these gaol birds, in a batch, but by twos and threes. Between the prison gate and the highway there is a spacious gravelled forecourt, bounded by railings and an open gate; so that literally a prisoner is free before he entirely quits the prison premises. Why on earth do they not run that thirty yards or so? They may if they please; there is no one to prevent them. Nay, there are plenty to encourage them—eager, anxious friends, with all the force of the heartfelt "Here he comes! jolly good luck to him; here he comes at last!" shining out of their eyes—they never venture, these attentive friends, within the opened gate just mentioned; but the newly-emerged ones don't run to meet them. The massive studded door slams them a parting salute, and they come along with as deliberate and cautious a step as though this long-pined-for liberty were like a pair of tight and uncomfortable boots to their feet.

On the Monday when I witnessed the gaol delivery here described, I think fourteen were the number of liberated prisoners, and they all came away thus soberly and sedately. Here I might tell of the sin-weary penitent who shuddered again to face a world so bristling with temptations; of the mere boy whose hitherto untried affections had so attached themselves to the governor and the chaplain that it was nothing less than heartrending to tear himself away—away from a prison so called, but in reality a paradise, where for the first time in his wretched small existence, he had tasted the sweets of home. I might write in this strain, but,

frankly, it would be without the warranty of experience. I have talked with scores of boys who have over and over again received the punishment due to thieves, and are thieves still—dirty, ragged, starving little thieves—and not one ever yet expressed a yearning towards the advantages offered them in the shape of prison board and lodging. Not that they were in the least alive to the disgrace attaching to gaol durance. I have said to them—

"Is it not true that in prison you get good hot food, and a comfortable bed, and that you are not worked too hard?"

"That's right enough, mister," was the answer; one experienced gentleman of twelve years old adding emphatically, "'Specially at Maidstun."

"Very well; and is it not likewise true that in the life you are now leading, you are glad to sleep in any hole or corner, and have seldom or never enough to eat?"

"'Tis so, mister; but you forgets how orful all alike the day is. When you're out you might be hard up, but you never knows what's going to turn up, one minit afore another; when ye're in quod it's all marked out for yer, and nothing *can't* turn up, 'cept it might be punishment;" adding, proudly, "I'd rather have 'arf a bellyful 'on the loose,' than roast meat and baked taters all day long in the steel (prison)."

You can't break them in, these raggad young wild colts, by means of the system at present adopted. It is all very well while the gaoler has them under lock and key, and the stern eye of the taskmaster is on them. It is good for the fierce and lawless youngsters to be made to feel "how orful all alike the day is." The next proper step to take would be to place them in a position in which they might learn how short and pleasant is a day passed honestly and industriously, and with profit alike to employer and employed. Instead of this, they are now and again caught and stalled, and groomed and fed for a season, and then cast out reckless and masterless, to be presently pursued and captured anew, as though they were creatures that afforded pleasant hunting, but belonged to a race likely to die out unless they were taken in hand occasionally, and fortified with a little blood and muscle.

These fledglings of the gaol-bird breed, like their elders, almost invariably find friends waiting for them outside the strong cage when the term of their incarceration expires—friends of about their own age, generally speaking, shoeless, ragged, faithful little wretches, who were, perhaps, the unlucky one's colleagues in the little transaction that ended so disastrously, but who were nimble enough to outrun the constable, and so make their escape. They have kept careful reckoning of when Jack's time would be up, and, breakfastless, they have made a barefooted pilgrimage from Whitechapel or Clerkenwell just to let young Jack see that they have not forgotton him, and show how much they sympathise with him in his misfortune. That, in their ignorance, is the view they take of the case; whereas it is plain as a pikestaff to the beholder that Jack has had very much the best of it.

It is simply absurd to regard Jack as a young fellow who has suffered punishment. He has passed a wholesome and healthful month in the country. He has a clean skin, the natural covering of his head has been cured from its old resemblance to a cast-aside stable mop; his eyes have recovered from that painful lack-lustre which comes of looking so very far ahead for a dinner, that very frequently it is tea-time and past before it is overtaken; and his cheeks have attained a little of the plumpness that in a boy of ten is as natural as the bloom on a cherry. "What chee, Jack? Come along, old son; you'll soon get over it." That's the mischief of it. He was fairly on his way towards getting over it"—over the clean skin, and the satisfied eyes, and the peaceful hair—the moment he fell in with those kind-hearted young ruffians, his friends, and they set their faces Whitechapelward. But that the chances are against young Jack's at present finding courage to repeat the exploit which snatched him during a blissful thirty days out of the kennel, one might feel almost tempted to the Christian act of walking before young Jack with one's silk handkerchief lapping a good hand's grip out of the coat tail-pocket.

Gaol birds older than Jack do not flit from the precincts of the prison so readily. They too have their "friends" waiting for them. Not a nice looking lot of people. Hulk-

ing, heavy-jawed gentlemen, with a great deal of the lower part of the face hidden in the thick folds of a "ropper," and with close-fitting caps and sea-faring looking jackets, into the side pockets of which the hands are thrust deep as the wrists, as though in guard of the neat and elegantly finished tools of his trade—the "jemmy," the skeleton keys, the life preserver. Individuals as different in appearance from the pick-pocket as the cart horse and the saddle horse. The last mentioned as well as the individuals who are in the heavy line of business are here to greet their released friends. Lithe, shabby-genteel young fellows, restless of eye and with the threadbare black coat buttoned at the waist, as though at any moment the wearer might be called on to perform some prodigious feat of running. Women, too. There is unfortunate Mrs. Maloney, whose lord and master six weeks since was condemned to imprisonment with hard labour for beating her face with his blacksmith's fists, and jumping on her till her staybusk was split into twenty splinters. Yes, here is Mrs. Maloney to this day wearing surgical sticking-plaster across the bridge of her nose, and with her eye still bloodshot from the onslaught of the murderous fists, pacing to and fro with the step of a lover waiting for her sweetheart, and with sixpence clutched tight in her hand—an olive-branch that shall in good time bear fruit in the shape of a pot of beer—her token of good will and peace towards the released Maloney.

And there, over by the lamp-post, stands watchful, another woman, the silk velvet trimming on whose hat alone cost more than Mrs. Maloney's entire rig out, from her pattens to her bonnet, but who is not by a thousand times so worthy a soul. This is a she-devil, whose den, probably, is situated in one of those respectable streets that branch out of the Haymarket; and her errand here this morning is to coax back to her clutches some poor wretch of a girl, whose felony, committed six months since, was every penny of it the hag's profit, and not the least her own. Here, opposite, and within fifty yards of the prison, they wait for the opening of the gate—not clustered together, but "hanging about" separately or in couples. There is hardly one that is not "known to the police," but this meeting-place before the gaol would

seem to be neutral ground, on which no man may raise his hand against his fellow.

And now you might know—even if you had not witnessed it—by the eager and incessant swinging to and fro of the doors of the "Bull in the Pound" that those other doors have opened. Here they come, crowding in, not hilarious and boisterous with gladness, though there are a few cases of mutual delirious delight—including that of Mr. and Mrs. Maloney, and, strangely enough, of the bulky brute in the burglarious jacket, whose scowling eyes are moist as over and over again he shakes hands with a she gaol bird, a mere girl of nineteen or so—but as eager for drink as though deprivation of it was the very essence of the punishment the late prisoners had endured. A pot of beer for the men—a full quart with a foaming head—and for the women, gin. Gin for the burglar's betrothed—she brought a good "tract" in her hand out of the prison with her, a parting gift of the hopeful chaplain, and now the quartern gin measure stands on it as it lies on the metal counter; gin for the virago who has just "served" three months for a murderous assault committed while in a state of mad drunkenness; gin for the lost gaol bird that has been looked for by the old hag, who for her own part pledges her restored captive in a big glass of neat brandy, and wishes her "better luck next time."

They do not stay long drinking at the bar of the "Bull in the Pound;" not one in half a dozen has the pot or glass replenished. The only remarkable part of the affair is that, almost without exception, discharged prisoners take to this "stirrup-cup" as a formality not to be set aside or dispensed with; as a sort of rebaptising, without which they would be ineligible to re-enter the world whence they have so long been shut out. I am not disposed to assert that there is any great harm in the ceremony, or that there would be less crime in the land if the "Bull in the Pound" were turned into a sweetmeat shop; but certainly it is not gratifying to know that these birds of peculiar feather habitually refresh their wings in gin or beer before they take flight back to their old hunting-grounds.

OUR DAILY BREAD.

He was neither a handsome nor a wholesome looking figure, as at five o'clock in the day he came slipshod over the sunny pavement, with a half-quartern loaf under his arm. He looked like what was once a spick-and-span lilywhite baker, fit to figure on a twelfthcake, only in the prime of his youth he had fallen into a dusthole and grown old and grey there, and had that very afternoon, made his escape; too much depressed just now by his protracted and dismal experiences to rejoice and be glad.

"As tired as a dog," he said he was; and so by his very first utterance bespoke himself a modest man, whose word might be relied on. If appearances went for anything, my poor old journeyman baker was more tired than any dog that ever ran on four legs. The only dog that could have matched him for jadedness and weariness of aspect must have been one of the ancient turnspit breed, who, in consequence of the indisposition of a mate, had fagged through many hours of "overtime" before a roaring kitchen fire. Either that dog or another I have seen about lately—an unhappy wretch of a half-starved French poodle, whose companion and master is a bagpiping, drunken, dancing Scotchman. Through the livelong day the wretched beast, in a gay Glengarry cap, that mocks the eloquent sadness of its eyes, and of its mouth, which droops so woefully at the corners, foots it mincingly on its hind legs, the bagpiper himself dancing fiercely, and leading the steps. As the day advances, the bagpiper's nose glows under the influence of accumulated twopenn'orths of whiskey, and then, his steadiness failing to keep pace with his perspiring vigour, he has a habit of treading on the poodle's toes; causing the agonised animal to emit sounds that the thoughtless crowd applauds, mistaking it for the sagacious creature's imitation of the triumphant whoop the Scotchman occasionally indulges in.

If the reader can picture that poodle at the close of a fatiguing day, and imagine the mire with which he is besmeared from head to foot to be dough-stains and flour-and-water splashes, he may form a tolerably correct idea as to the sort of tired dog my journeyman baker looked. He had no regular service, but was an "odd man"—that is to say, an extra hand employed on the busiest day of the week, which is Saturday. There used to be a great deal of talk about slave-grown sugar being moistened with the tears of the poor enthralled black men who cultivated it. I should not be astonished if much of that saline flavour that is commonly found in cheap bread is due to the tears of the severely-worked and badly-paid odd men. "I've been at it, sir," said the old journeyman, with a yawn that caused the veneering of dough on his countenance to crackle like the glaze on an old white plate—"I've been at it since eight o'clock last night, and now its five (twenty-one hours), for three-and-sixpence and a half-quartern. That isn't the regular pay—it's four shillings; but when a man gets to my age he can't stick out for sixpence." So we went a little further, until we came on a snuggery known to him as celebrated for the quality of its porter and favourable to uninterrupted converse, and there we sat down, with the loaf on the table.

And here I may state that I was not altogether unprepared for the revelations my journeyman baker might make to me. I had already given some consideration to the poor man's loaf. Horrified as I was, and as thousands of fathers of families must have been, by the appalling rumour recently set floating—that the science of adulteration as regards bread had advanced a prodigious stride, and that, instead of comparatively simple alum, some deadly preparation of copper was now used by the murderous baker to give colour to bad flour—in order to test this alarming accusation, I caused to be obtained from six various poor neighbourhoods as many two-pound loaves, which were placed in the same able hands to which were entrusted for analysis the samples of gin and beer treated of some time since. Before I sought my baker, who in forty years of his practical life must have made tens of thousands of loaves, I had in my possession Professor

Attfield's report. What I was desirous of ascertaining was, in what degree a working baker's statement would correspond with the inexorable verdict of the man of science.

"I have been a journeyman baker over forty years, and I dare say that in a regular service and as odd man I have worked in fifty shops in London at the very least, and I never knew anything but the regular alum to be used in the way of what you call adulteration. Never, except at——'s, in the Kentish Town Road. There was something used there, but I don't know the name of it. It was kept locked up, and when we wanted to make a biling of it we had to go to the master, and he gave it us—about a pint of it. It was like fine salt, only shinier. We used to stir it in a copper of water till the copper-stick would stand upright in it, then it was ready for use. It's all nonsense. What interest has the baker got in poisoning people? All that he wants to do is to eke out his flour and make as much out of it as he can, or, if his flour is rather dicky, to make it pass. Nothing's better than alum; it certainly do work wonders with flour that isn't up to the mark. Sometimes too much is used, I dare say; but that isn't always the baker's fault.

"What do I mean by that? Why, that the baker is misled. The flour is very often doctored before he gets it. I won't say it of town millers, but I'll make bold to say it of country millers that it is quite a common practice with them to alum the flour. Country millers who have a lot of commission shops, go ahead with the alum worse than any of 'em. It's pretty much between some of the millers and some of the bakers as it is between the big brewers and the public-houses. There are hundreds of shops in London with the baker's name over the door, but it's no more his business than it's yours. That's where the mischief is. A baker gets into difficulties, and can't pay up; and, especially if it is a good cutting neighbourhood, in comes the miller, and takes the business over his head, allowing, say, five shillings a sack for making, and the bit of extra profit he may be able to make on rolls, and them sort of small things. The baker doesn't have a chance. They're wide-awake, them country millers

They know to a grain almost how much alum their flour will stand, and if the baker ventures on a little bit more, so as to make an extra few shillings on his own hook, as the saying is, why, you see, he very often makes a mess of it.

"Alum the flour strong—strong to bear water, as well as whitening it. It 'binds;' and when you use a lot of rice and 'taters, you wants a binder for 'em."

"How much rice is used, say, to a sack of flour?"

"It depends on the neighbourhood—if it's a 'cutting' or a 'fair price.' You might take a pound of rice as commonly used to a sack of flour. No, it don't *seem* much; but think of the lot of water a pound of boiled rice sucks up if it's properly managed. Eight quarts it will suck up; and there's sixteen pounds' weight to begin with. There isn't any secret about bread-making—it's all a question of getting the article to stand as much water as possible. That's where the baker's profit is. He is a good baker who can get ninety-eight four-pound loaves out of a sack of flour with the other grievances"—he meant "ingredients," but he called them grievances most distinctly. "I'm speaking of country flour."

"A sack of town flour will make a hundred-and-two four-pound loaves. Country flour is always two and three shillings a sack cheaper than town. In knocking up a cheap loaf the management of the oven has a lot to do with it. Good bread will bake in a brisk oven in an hour and a quarter, but the other sort wants nursing. If your oven was too fierce, it would draw all the profit out—the water I mean, that you've been trying to get into it. It must be baked slow for two hours in a slack oven, and then you are able to 'draw it with the gravy in it,' as we say. We have to make a good allowance with this kind of bread for steaming off—an ounce to the pound. It will lose quite that, and perhaps a little more. It wouldn't do in poor neighbourhoods to make the bread full weight. They buy their bread out of the scale, and they would think they were cheated if they didn't get the bit over. People that deal at 'cutting shops' will have a tall loaf and a white loaf, and it is impossible to accommodate them at the price unless they will stand to the alum and the rest of the grievances.

"The quantity of salt isn't always the same. Generally it's

three pound in six bushels; but new flour takes more. I can't speak exactly as to alum. Bakers have got their own ideas, and a set of customers that get used to the flavour of their bread. I should use about ten ounces to the sack if I had queer flour given me to make a showy loaf of; but I have used as much as a pound, and nobody has grumbled. Do I think it would be better if people made their own bread? I do; if they could depend on the flour they bought. If they bought it at a commission shop that was served by one of them country millers I was speaking of, they would be no more free from alum than if the baker made their bread. There's an awful lot of fiddling in the flour that the bakers sell. When they scale it into the bags there's an ounce weight always put in to pay for the paper bags, and then lots of 'em will work in a lot of rice-flour and bean meal."

The six loaves that were to be tested were obtained from the localities here mentioned—Clerkenwell, Lambeth, Whitechapel, Islington, Westminster, and Bethnal Green. The shops selected were none of them noted for selling cheap bread, but were just the ordinary brisk trade-doing establishments, such as may be found in all populous districts. Each loaf was lettered and delivered to Mr. Broad, of Hornsey Rise, and the following is his report:—

Sir,—All the samples of bread you sent to me on the 17th instant contain alum. 'R,' 'O,' 'T,' 'A,' and 'P,' have clearly been made by adding one ounce of alum to one bushel of flour, equivalent to 28 grains of alum in a 4lb. loaf, for in every 1,000 grains of bread there is an amount of pure alumina (the characteristic constituent of alum), corresponding to three-quarters of a grain of alum. The specimen 'S,' contains just *double* this quantity of alum.

"The analysis has been confirmed by Professor Attfield.

"JOHN BROAD."

Thus it appears, as regards the adulteration of bread, that the testimony of the journeyman baker of forty years' experience remains unimpeached. Only the "regular alum" is used; and though it has elsewhere been shown that sulphate of copper has been detected in the bread which we eat, and on which we mainly feed our children, it does not

possess qualities that justify its universal use in preference to the milder poison. There can be no doubt as to the "regular use" of alum, no doubt that it is a terribly pernicious substance to take into the stomach. "A few grains taken now and then might not do any harm," says Mr. Broad; "but there can be no question that its constant use is extremely hurtful, especially in the case of young and delicate children." Its effect on the digestive organs are pretty much the same as its effects on dough. "It binds," and consequently induces very mischievous symptoms. Of its reckless use we have ample proof in the fact that one worthy tradesman of the selected six did not scruple to double what appears to be the quantity commonly regarded as sufficient; nor is his iniquity palliated by the strong probability that he was driven to the excessive use of alumina to cover a quantity of flour so vile that it would not pass muster without this amount of doctoring.

This is the ugliest feature of the case. In the manufacture of wholesome bread, there is not the slightest reason why an atom of alum should be used. It is not found in what is known as full-priced bread; it is banished from the premises of the wholesome bread factor. It is only patronised by such bakers as constantly buy and use inferior and damaged flour; and those men, so long as they can conjure into existence something bearing the semblance of good wheaten bread, and, therefore, be able to be sold as such, are troubled with no qualms of conscience about the mode of accomplishing that feat of legerdemain. Unfortunately, as events have proved, this class of baker forms the large majority of those whose daily business is to feed the three millions of our great city.

It is impossible to conceive a more important matter than this mild poisoning of the staff of our existence. There is no avoiding the evil while it is suffered to exist. Aware that tea is covered with poison, either mineral or vegetable, we may avoid tea, and resign ourselves to the simple swindle of chicory and coffee, or we may fall back on the pump, and defy the whole race of cheats who cater for our beverages. We may take alarm at the tricks of the butter trade, and banish the suspected substance from our breakfast table

But we are helpless in the matter of bread. It is the "regular thing" to use alum; and to avoid Mr. Smith's shop, and transfer your patronage to Mr. Jones on the other side of the street, is only to embark in a blind speculation of alum, more or less. To eat "household bread," as it is commonly called, is to be condemned to take into the system at every mouthful a certain quantity of an article which is antagonistic to the health of the strongest, and which, in the case of the young and delicate, will assuredly tend to weaken the slender threads that hold life together. Such pave the way for the coming, at dusky evening, of that dreadful man who bears a little coffin on his shoulder. You can't, if the journeyman baker is to be believed, escape the machinations of the man of dough. The health-destroyer is in the flour. The "jolly miller," the emblem of all that is hearty and honest—the hale, bluff, manly miller, who has so often been eulogised in song—turns out to be but a so-so character, after all. In future there will be no more romance in the clink of the mill than in the clatter of an underground Whitecross sausage machine. Unless the journeyman baker is a malicious slanderer, the country miller puts alum in the flour, even before it is consigned to the sack that is to convey it to the ordinary place of sophistication—the cellar of the baker. He is Giant Blundabore amongst a wretched race of impecunious bakers. He gobbles up all his profits, legitimate and illegitimate. He will be first robber. He adulterates the flour ready to their hands. He alums it to such a nice extreme, that should the desperate bread-kneader essay to catch a sly shilling or two by the use of a pinch or more of the precious commodity, the jolly miller is sure to bowl him out in less than a week, and his shop is handed over to a more faithful servant.

THE DELIGHTS OF BARNET.

HAD it been the railway station nearest to Donnybrook at the time when the celebrated fair of that district is in full swing, it would not have so much surprised me; but in peaceful England, within twelve miles from Charing Cross, to find the road impeded by a gang of men and lads crying "Who'll buy a stick? Who'll have a ground-ash for a penny? What gen'leman hain't got a stick?" was somewhat amazing. The proposition so earnestly pressed was the more alarming from the aspect of the sticks offered for sale. No make-believe dandy shams, varnished and tasselled were they, but stout twigs of timber in the bark, and wanting only a prog at the end to make them worthy the handling of a bullock drover. "Who'll 'ave a ground-ash? Here yer are, sir! You'll want it." This was by no means what I had bargained for, my mission being one of peace; but the individual who made the last offer accompanied it with a wink so significant that it seemed the extreme of rashness to disregard it. So I bought a ground-ash, and took the road, the dust of which was already dotted all over like a sheep-run with the impressions of other ground-ashes that had gone before.

It was the first day of the Barnet Fair days; but business before pleasure. This was Monday, and the time-honoured, and dearly cherished carnival of the London costermonger was not until Wednesday. There was much business to do in the interval. Between the Whetstone side of Barnet and the common, the meadows were teaming with cattle—little black oxen, old-fashioned and tough-looking, from Wales, and Highland steers, and Devons, and Herefords, and dairy cattle, to say nothing of sheep. But a glance at the enormous crowds that the railway brought to Barnet, made it evident that though nine-tenths meant business, it was not in the sheep and oxen line. There is a solemn deliberation of gait, a slowness of eye, a solemnity of visage about folks who deal

in beef and mutton producing animals, that makes it impossible to confound them with those whose hearts are fixed on horses. There is a smartness, a glibness, a springiness of the legs, in the latter that would as ill fit the former, as tandem harness would a bullock team. The dress of the two is markedly different. The man of bucolic tendencies, has a disposition to be loose in his attire. His ample wide-awake admits of side winds to keep cool his solid, calculating head; there is room to thrust in a hand between his neckerchief and his throat. It doesn't in the least matter if his coat is three sizes too large for him, or that the laces of his boots are slack, even to slovenliness. On the contrary, with a certain class of persons the possession of a horse, a pony, or a donkey —nay, the mere hankering after one—induces a contraction of the habiliments which it seems impossible to resist. Every article of attire must fit as tight on the wearer as the skin of the well-beloved quadruped adheres to its body. His bullet head in his all-round hairy cap fits like a pudding in a basin. He winds lengths of white woollen cloth about his neck, so that it looks like surgical bandaging. His jacket is buttoned tight up, and it is a miracle how he contrives to thrust his enormous feet through the ridiculously narrow legs of his corduroys. Of this sort were the great majority of the merry troopers who tramped over the mile that lies between the railway station and the Fair ground.

I will have nothing to say respecting the oxen and sheep. I don't know a teg from a wether, and I have not the remotest idea what a full-mouthed stock ewe is like. I passed on the road a printed placard testifying that David Jones, from some remote place in Wales, would hold his black cattle market on a piece of land behind some inn; and a little further on, through a gap in the hedge, I saw chalked on a board the mystic inscription, "Cow fair; traps a shillin'." But I had come on purpose to see the horses, and I pushed on. Presently I obtained a glimpse of them.

From the main road the horse field at Barnet presents a spectacle to describe which is as difficult as it is at first sight to understand it. I already knew what a horse-market was like—a metropolitan market, that is to say—and was prepared to find this one slightly uproarious; but

that first glance brought me to a standstill. The horse field was distant about two yards or so ; and what I saw from the main road was a gradual slope ascending from the front, on which was a row of refreshment booths ; the most capacious and prominent of them being kept by prize fighters, whose names in full, or affectionately abbreviated, are inscribed on flags which flutter out bravely from the tops of the tent poles.

On the summit of the slope, exactly opposite, are other refreshment booths; and I may here mention, though unhappily without being able to explain the singular gastronomic fact, that the staple viands at Barnet Fair are roast pork and roast goose. The consequence is that the prevailing aroma of sage and onions is very striking. The tent-keepers are proud of this feast of pork, and make all the display of it they can. Suspended above the heads of those who sit at the dining-tables are mighty joints of the recently-slaughtered animal, and exposed at the farther end is the kitchen and the powerful cooks, with bare and hairy arms, looming moist and shiny in a midst of well-basted crackling.

On a slope between the two ranges of tents the horse fair is held: but at a distance it appears like a tremendous battle between horses and men. Is is one heaving sea, quadrupeds and bipeds being so wedged together as to be terribly suggestive of crushed ribs and mangled bodies trampled under foot. It is a chaos of manes and hoofs, and tails and heads, open mouths and teeth on which the sun glistens, and waving human hands and arms. There is an incessant bobbing up and down of human heads—gaol-cropped some, hideously tangled and uncombed others—the mouths of the owners being almost as wide open as the horses' mouths, but with far less innocent intent. What materially assists the fanciful imagination bent on framing to itself the picture of a field of battle is the brilliant display of pennons of crimson and yellow and green affixed to what from the roadway might easily be taken for pike-staves. These gay fluttering things rise high and then fall as though suddenly struck out of the hand that grasped them, and all in the midst of clouds of brown dust that betray how fiercely the war is raging, and amidst the war-like noise, the neighing and screaming of

horses, the agonised howls and yells of men, the clapping of hands, and the stamping of feet.

It is, indeed, a fearful and wonderful sight this fair; but it must be admitted that a closer inspection somewhat spoils the romance with which distance invests it. You scramble across an intervening meadow; you trespass at this spot on the premises of a railway company who have sliced their right of way from the previously not over large and ancient horse field, and here you are at the very verge of the arena. Then you discover that all this horrible din—all this roaring and raving—this Bedlamitish shrieking and howling—is simply the accompaniment of the sale of certain harmless and inoffensive quadrupeds. In the distance it looked a fierce struggle between the four-legged and the two-legged—a struggle in which the chances of victory were about equal; but a nearer inspection at once destroyed this pleasant delusion. At a glance it became certain that the two-legged brutes had the best of it. It is a fact no less remarkable than melancholy, that when human nature sinks to the extreme of abasement, so that its blunted intellect is but little superior to what is called instinct, it takes infinite delight in torturing animals that are only beneath it in so far that they go on four legs.

The horse especially is an object of this impish hostility. Any one who recollects old Smithfield market, or, for that matter—for we not improved in this respect to the extent some folks may think—any one whose misfortune it has been to pass through the northern market of Islington on a horse-market day—cannot fail to have observed the pleasure which certain savages of the human species take in ill-using any unlucky nag that is there trotted out to display its paces. It has to run up and down a lane edged on either side with enemies, each one of whom thinks himself unlucky, and deprived of a treat, unless he can administer to the bewildered animal a prod with a spiked stick, or a slash with a sharp thonged whip. Should he be baulked in this, he seeks solace in shouting and yelling after the escaped victim, as though it were some satisfaction to affright him.

The cruel propensity of this barbarous tribe is held some-

what in check by the presence of the police and the market inspectors. But at Barnet these are wanting. It is a grand day with the horse-torturing fraternity. They gather on the horse-field hundreds strong, with no man to check them in their wicked freaks. It must be a dreadful day for the poor beasts. One can easily imagine that dreary company of worn-out horses standing under the shed in Mr. Atcheler's yard, and, while they wait their turn to be fetched into the poleaxing department, beguiling the tedious time by telling stories of their past experiences. There are horses whose knees have been broken in omnibuses; horses that can recount dreadful experiences of night cabs; one, perhaps, that brings tears into the eyes of the others by relating the harrowing story of a blind horse in a brick field. But presently one that has not yet spoken says, in a hoarse whisper, "Friends, were you ever at Barnet? Was it ever the fate of anyone here to spend a livelong day in that field of horror?" They have heard dark rumours of it, some of them; but now they lay their heads together, and listen with staring eyes till the horrifying narrative is at an end; and then, with a shiver of sympathy, they resign themselves to their fate, blessing their stars that they have been spared such an infliction, and edging quite cheerfully towards the door that will be presently opened by a man with a red axe in his fist.

I do not mean that this is so—I merely submit the possibility of such equine commmuning. Horses are wonderful creatures. Everybody has heard of the Arab steed that gnawed his tether through with his teeth, and then, seizing his master, bound hand and foot, carried him in triumph off the field of battle to the bosom of his family. It is said to be on the records of the Veterinary College that an equine patient of theirs committed suicide by dashing his brains out against the wall, unable any longer to endure the pangs of toothache. Just imagine then, a creature capable of such reasonable behaviour—a helpless, friendless victim in Barnet field—in the hands of his persecutors. I am afraid to make a guess at the number of horses that were in that one field. Probably there were a couple of thousand, exclusive of the immense droves of ponies, unkempt and fresh

from the Welsh mountains. Closely huddled together, however, as were horses and men, space had yet to be made in which to show them off, as possible purchasers came up, and then ensued the demoniac spectacle already hinted at. Let the reader imagine a row of horses, tethered so closely to each other, that their sides touch, and further that there is a grey horse among them. Some one wishes to view the grey horse, and straightway its head is loosed, and it is backed out. Then the fun begins. To the calm observer it seems that what the possible purchaser desires to be convinced of is that the grey horse is of such a patient disposition that no amount of goading or exasperation can drive him raving mad. If this is so, the test is as honestly severe as can be desired. A long and strong rope is affixed to the creature's headstall, and the first manœuvre is to give a tremendous tug at this, and at the same time a cruel sting with the whip, and then, when the poor beast starts back in terror, "Yah! hi! hi! yah!" is shrieked in insulting mockery at his frantic efforts to break away.

But by this time other demons appear on the scene, and now I learn the secret of the flags before mentioned. They were not pennons attached to pikestaffs, but simply yards of stout, coloured calico made fast to long hazel sticks. Experience has proved that with this ingenious instrument a horse, purblind with age, and desperately indifferent to blows, may be startled out of its wits, and made to exhibit a frantic activity which the unsuspecting buyer may be persuaded arises from the skittishness of youth. While the unhappy grey is resenting these tugs at the rope which threaten to tear away its upper lip, another tormentor rushes at him behind, and, by a dexterous movement of his red flag, causes it to go snap, snap, with a noise like so many pistol shots. So urged, the grey springs round, and encounters a yellow flag snapped before its eyes, with a fiendish yell of "Yah! hi! yah! hup!" and if he has any spark of spirit in him he now rears on his haunches, only to be speedily brought to his four feet again by a tug at the rope.

All the time that the tortured and terror-stricken animal is panting and sweating under these various injuries, there are eight or ten of the gang performing a dance about him,

yelling out sounds indescribable, and with their sticks executing a lively imitation of the drum on their hard felt hats and caps. And be it understood, this is going on in twenty different parts of the field at one and the same moment. Of course, these trials do not invariably result in a sale, but when the transaction does so terminate, it appears to be the custom to celebrate it in the same manner. "Sold again! Yah! hi! yah! hip! Sold again!" and the confederates engage in a dance of delight, flapping their flags, rattling their sticks, and flinging their cap, or that of any bystander, for they are in not in the least particular, up in the air.

But I think the most curious spectacle, and the most amusing, only that there was a touch of pity in it, was to be seen among the Welsh ponies. They are disreputable, shabby looking, shaggy little animals, with tangled manes, and their ears exhibiting that interior fluffiness that bespeaks the uncultivated colt. Wild as they are, however, they are not tethered. They stood in droves of, say, fifty each, and the most scientific picketing would have failed to bring them closer together or more compact. They made a ring, with their noses towards the centre, and their tails outward; and there they stood, shifting a little way to the right or left when the great roaring mob came pressing against them, but remaining as firmly side by side as though they were strung together. So docile and quiet did they seem, that any one unacquainted with their peculiarities might have wagered that he would have fetched out one and led it home as quiet as a sheep. He would have speedily discovered his mistake, however. As I gazed on the apparently timid flock, and mused on the gentleness of nature in all things mountain-born, an individual who was standing by inquired of Mr. Reece, the proprietor, the price of a bay pony, the size of a small donkey. Eight pounds was the price asked, and Mr. Reece cried to his man Davis to fetch the animal out. Davis was a stiff-built young fellow, with broad shoulders and a weight that must have almost equalled the pony's; and it surprised me to see him "pull himself together," as the vulgar saying is, and take up another hole in his waist strap before he commenced the job.

Then he made a manful leap into the midst of the drove,

and pinioned the bay in a twinkling. One arm was round its neck, while his right hand firmly grasped it between the nostrils. The suddenness of the assault seemed for a moment to fill the pony with dismay. It suffered itself to be dragged away from its comrades for a short distance, but then, recovering its presence of mind, it made a stand. It reared up on its hind legs, with its mane bristling and its eyes glaring, and its mouth viciously open. It was a fair stand-up fight between Davis and the pony; and from the cool manner of the former, it was plain that it was no more than he had bargained for. To release his unfortunate nose, the pony reared higher still, and rolled over, but Davis rolled with him, puffing and blowing, all the time sharply reprimanding the perverse little brute in the Welsh tongue. It wanted to get back to the drove. It had been brought up in the drove, and felt no terrors while permitted to remain there. Its struggles, its agonized gasps and snorts, told how painfully it felt the severance, while the sacred looks of its comrades were significant signs that they heard, and deplored their inability to help. It was only when the frantic little bay had been dragged by a dozen strong hands out of sight and sound of the herd, that it consented to stand on its four legs, and to permit the halter, that was symbolic of its future condition of slavery, to be slipped over its ears.

Nor was this an exceptional instance of the courageous determination evinced by the Welsh ponies to resist to the last the subjugating hand of man. Before I left the horse-field, I witnessed at least a dozen of these man-and-pony fights; and in no instance did the animal yield without a struggle that caused infinite amusement to the fiends of the calico flags and the other merciless howlers and yelpers, whose violence increased as the business of the day grew hotter. It soon grew too hot for me. An hour since I had come to be grateful to the vendor of "ground ashes" for his friendly hint. But, lacking the heart to inflict unceremonious blows on every hoof that came dangerously near me, and having some regard for an old established corn on a middle toe, I made my way back across the railway, and so gained the comparatively peaceful high road.

A REVOLUTIONIST STRONGHOLD.

ONCE upon a time, having an inclination to obtain an insight into the strange companionship of English Republicanism, I betook myself to a meeting convened by the Patriots and held on Clerkenwell Green. It was on an evening in the summer, and I got into conversation with a promising young Revolutionist who stood at my elbow. I afterwards found that he was what is called a "sweep-washer" in the gold-smithing way, but at the time I took him to be a person in the peripatetic pastry and sweet-stuff line. He had no basket—indeed it was the invisibility of that necessary article that first drew my attention particularly towards him A Republican chief was on his legs in a greengrocer's cart drawn up just by the pump, and my young friend, with his visage as pale as a baker's, and set teeth, had his eager gaze fixed intently on the orator the while he muttered, half aloud, "Pies and biscuits! Pies and biscuits! that's the sort. There's nothing like 'em. Pies and barrakays!"

The latter word was new to me, but I supposed it to be some new-fangled article of confectionery of the hardbake or toffey kind. Presently, however, some uncommonly treasonable outburst on the part of the orator in the cart made him bold to relax his clenched teeth a little, and his less impeded utterance opened my eyes to the young desperado's real character.

It was not "pies and biscuits" that he was muttering, but pikes and muskets, and the innocent sweetmeat became barricades."

"There's nothing like' em," exclaimed the pale youth, turning to me, clashing his narrow jaws viciously together as though barricades were his natural food, of which he had long been deprived, and were famished for want. "What do you say, guv'ner!"

I whispered him back that at present I was undecided

between barricades and petroleum, on which he released a dirty hand from the bosom of his waistcoat and tendered me the grip of brotherhood on the spot. We got into conversation.

"It is tremendously hot," said I "standing out here in the blazing sun; wouldn't it be better to meet somewhere under cover."

"Lor' bless yer! our place wouldn't hold a quarter of 'em," said he.

"Our place?"

"Ah, you know—'Hole in the Wall,'* up in Kirby Street. It's a regular snug crib in the winter, but it's too close in the summer. Ever been there on Sunday nights?"

I was ignominiously compelled to admit that I never had.

"Ho, it's a treat I tell you," replied my young friend, wagging his head in rapture at the mere recollection.

"It's head-quarters, don't you know—where the banners is, and where the portraits and the pictures is. Lor' bless you, what you hear here is on'y milk-and-water to some of the speechifying of Sunday nights at the 'Hole.' Ha! I should like to catch a skyun of the aristocracy trying to do the lofty with us there! I should like to see one of 'em so much as put his head in at the door!"

And the precious young Republican snapped his lean jaws again with as much relish as though they had at that moment fixed on the ear of the unfortunate "skyun" under the startling conditions above-mentioned.

We parted affectionately by the Sessions House, my friend confiding to me his firm conviction that the happy time was approaching when we should see the gutters of Belgravia running with gore, and it was not until quite recently that the accidental perusal of a scrap of newspaper recalled to my mind our conversation, and also the resolution I at the time made, that, come the winter, I would one Sunday evening avail myself of the treat the young gentleman with the jaws had described to me. There was to be an "important meeting and discussion," at the 'Hole in the Wall' on the coming Sunday evening, at half-past eight o'clock, and all true friends were invited to attend.

* This stronghold of English Republicanism has since been removed to more convenient premises, in the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell Green.

I was not a true friend, but I felt that I was open to conviction, and might become so one of these days, and I considered that fact a sufficient ground for accepting the invitation.

It was not a pleasant night. It rained, and the wind blew about the gaslight in the lamps of the public-houses in dismal Kirby Street in a manner that rendered it difficult to decipher the signs.

A rare night for conspirators! I was passing up the darkest part of the street hesitating of whether it would be safe to make inquiries of a policeman, when from a shadowy doorway a voice called out, "Hi! my friend! here!" Was *this* the "Hole in the Wall!" Had Republicanism grown to this pitch—that the brotherhood did not scruple to challenge strangers and passers-by to join their ranks! I walked to the dark doorway. "Did you call?" I asked of a person of whom I could make out nothing but his white neckcloth. "Yes, my friend; our mission-room is at the end of the passage here, and the good Word is about to be preached. Come in for half-an-hour!" I don't know whether this is the common way in which they fish for wayfaring sinners in the shady neighbourhood of Leather Lane; I only knew that, hole in the wall as it undoubtedly was, it was not that one of which I was in quest, and passed on.

At last I found it: the stronghold of Revolutionists the council-place from which from time to time emanate those startling manifestos that bewilder Scotland Yard and drive the Home Secretary almost crazy.

It is not an imposing edifice, the "Hole in the Wall." It is a small and particularly dingy public-house, with nothing to redeem it from absolute commonplace excepting a modest card in the window announcing that there was a "discussion" every Sunday and Thursday, admission free. It was plain from the outside where the discussion was held, for on the dingy blinds of the first floor were reflected several heads, three or four with hats on, and one adorned with a bonnet. I could of course form no idea of the face that was beneath the bonnet, but I must confess that my timid nature derived unspeakable comfort from the feminine reflection. Supposing that when I was in the midst of this band of desperate

and daring men, I were somehow betrayed and my true character revealed! The bare thought was enough to conjure to my mind a picture of what would instantly follow—the gleaming daggers, the heavy bolts on the doors shot in their sockets, the hasty book passed round and pressed to white lips, so that the oath, "Death to traitors!" might be renewed; the red cap plucked from the figure of Liberty, and thrust over my head, and pulled down over my eyes; and then the shriek of a woman, "Nay, he shall not die! Doubtless he once had a mother—*I* am a mother—spare him!" Murmuring blessings on the bonnet, I pushed open the door, and, ordering a pint of stout a screw of mild bird's-eye as I passed the bar, I made straight for the stairs before me and ascended.

Stern truth compels me to remark that my first impression on gazing around was, that the British Crown and Constitution are in no immediate peril, if the Opposition at the "Hole in the Wall" are their most formidable enemies.

It was not an "off night" by any means. A Republican leader of eminence was on his legs even as I entered, and the business in hand was considered sufficiently attractive to induce at least a hundred and fifty decently dressed persons to brave the inclement weather and come and assist at it. The room, or rather rooms—for there are two knocked into one—are so small that the place was crowded, and at least twenty blocked the landing outside, on the hard chance of squeezing in presently. By means of a wink on my part of the recognised value of twopence at least, the waiter got me in under false pretences, and elbowed a way for me right up to the fire-place, and stood my stout on the mantelshelf.

From this point I had an excellent view of the room. There could be no doubt as to the place being the head-quarters of at least this branch of the Republican League, for there, in a stack at one end of the room, were the big and little banners that are unfurled only on special occasions. At either end of the rooms too there was a raised platform, somewhat larger than the top of an ordinary chest of drawers, with a raised seat, and an awning of dingy old chintz. The walls and ceiling are cracked and weather-stained, and there are a few coloured prints and pictures on the walls, the latter

being chiefly persons of Republican note, with a coloured print of the interior of the House of Lords with members assembled, all dinted and stained, as though in their virtuous frenzy the denouncers of a bloated aristocracy had flung the dregs of their rum-and-water at it, and pelted it with bits of tobacco-pipe. Over the door-way is the design of a working man—a figure of Liberty ramming home a charge in a cannon, with the mysterious words beneath, "Ireland—Chain Shot."

Then here are some framed boards inscribed with the names of the great men—some who have been, and some who still are attached to the cause. Horrible daubs these; as ill-lettered as the rules of a goose club exhibited in the tap-room of a beer-shop; the work of a genius who has as much disrespect for the Queen's English as for Majesty herself, for he spells solicitor "ter." As for the company, among which might be counted fifteen or twenty females, it seemed to be of the respectable mechanic sort. A good-humoured assemblage, with a partiality it scorned to conceal for tobacco and beer, and one that was not to be checked by the lack of table room to stand a quart-pot on. Nay, the trifling inconvenience afforded those present an opportunity of demonstrating still once again that invention—which of course means the grandeur and greatness of a nation—is peculiarly the offspring of the necessitous. Many of those present, as they sat on their chairs, held their hats by the brim between their knees, and converted the hat's interior into a snug receptacle for their pint of sixpenny—an instance of ingenuity that might be sought in vain amongst the bloated aristocracy.

But the most remarkable feature of the evening was that, though those who would have it so tried desperately hard, for it was not a Republican meeting at all. That is to say, it was not, as I had fully expected—and what anyone who from time to time may have read of the tremendous doings at this stronghold of revolutionists would naturally expect—it was not an assemblage of persons who were unanimous in their discontent of affairs as they exist, and who come together to chafe at the old wound and keep it open, and amongst whom there is but one opinion as to the manner of healing

it.' To be sure there were a few of the red-hot school present, men who have seen service beneath the Reformers' Tree in Hyde Park, men who have spouted sedition to such an insane extent that, compassionating their infirmity, Government has refrained from shutting their mouths; such men as these were there, and spoke with as much violence as ever, but it was only the few that applauded; and when they had done and more temperate men rose and had their say exactly on the other side, it was impossible not to perceive that these gave most satisfaction. I can't say what has gone before, but taking that Sunday evening as a fair sample of a Republican meeting and of what are the prospects of Republicanism in London, I should say that it would be a mere waste of labour to attempt to snuff it out. The "brief candle" is already spasmodically flashing and flaring in the socket of the candlestick, and will presently expire without the aid of an extinguisher.

This certainly was my conviction, as at eleven o'clock I gladly made my way out of the unwholesome room reeking with tobacco smoke and the fumes of gin and beer, but it occurred to me afterwards that perhaps I jumped at somewhat hasty conclusions. I should not forget that it was Sunday night, and that it was very possible that many staunch Republicans might refrain from putting in an appearance from religious scruples. They met twice a week, Sunday and Thursday, and if I came on a Thursday I might find a very different state of things.

Stay, I may do something better still. At the bar of the "Hole in the Wall," and on the walls of the discussion hall, were printed notifications to the effect, that on Monday a concert would be held in the hall for the benefit of a tried and faithful Republican leader, and it was most sincerely hoped that on such an occasion his friends would rally round him.

This was exactly the thing. There might be many men whose conversion to the ways of Republicanism was so complete that they were content to sit and enjoy their opinions at home. But here was a claim on their gratitude as well as on their opinions. Here was a brother, a prominent man and a leader, who, perhaps, had expended his little savings

in forwarding those interests they all had so much at heart, and who now would be sincerely glad to receive from his numerous friends the small sum of twopence each—that was the price of admission to the concert—to help him in his distress. Here would be a splendid opportunity, if London Republicanism had any pluck remaining in them, to display their zeal to make the patriotic speech, to sing the song of revolution and regeneration.

Anticipating a crowded gathering, I reached the "Hole in the Wall" half-an-hour before the advertised time of beginning the concert, but I was much more than that time too soon. As the appointed time drew nigh, three or four increased to ten, perhaps, and then somebody thought, perhaps we might as well get upstairs. Some of them did not pay, however, for when there were at least thirteen persons present there were only sixteen-pence in the plate, as the well-spread pence themselves confessed.

Then came in two notables, one of them, indeed, a gentleman who by this time might have written M.P. after his name, had he not been unfortunate; but the company took no more notice of him than if he had been the waiter, and he took four of gin-and-water in a corner. Then began the singing, which fortunately was enlivened by the laughter and engaging liveliness of three or four married female Republicans who were tossing their male friends for threes of hot rum at a side table. I say that it was fortunate that these mirthful ladies were present, or otherwise the company might have gone to sleep. There were no stormy songs sung.

The spirit of Song was as languid as though it were hard up for the twopences, and foresaw what a dismal failure the affair was. Somebody sang "Brigham Young," and somebody else "Good Old Jeff," and some one else "Tom Bowling."

By half-past ten, there were, perhaps four more songs sung of an equally soul-stirring and revolutionary character, and there was about three-and-sixpence in the plate; but after this the company began to dwindle, and I thought it time to take my departure.

TO BE FATTENED FOR CHRISTMAS.

SCARCELY has summer green ripened to autumn brown, than thrifty housewives of the working classes, with a wary look-out ahead, and taught by experience that winter's dreariness ofttimes brings with it slackness of work and a diminution of wages, laudably set about making, while the sun yet shines, a little hay for Christmas storage. Loyal to the chief of feasts and festivals, they arrange that the fat goose destined to grace the dinner table is bespoke even while it is at present little better than a gosling innocently disporting in some distant country farm-yard. Through the agency of some accommodating projector of a goose-club, the purchase money for the esteemed bird is accepted in instalments of sixpence a week, the period over which the subscription extends being so nicely adjusted that by the time the twenty-first small coin falls due the feathered victim has arrived at just that pitch of perfection when it is most acceptable as a roast sacrifice.

It is not generally known, however, that within the past few years an attempt has been made to improve on the economical plan above described. It is to be hoped that it is not the prevailing mistrust of all manner of commercial speculations that is at the bottom of this falling away from what in certain circles has become almost a time-honoured institution. It would be painful, indeed, if it transpired that the disposition of those who operate in the monetary world to regard shyly and with suspicion affairs in which they are invited to become shareholders as has spread to poor folk, leading them to regard goose-club sixpences as an investment not to be embarked in without grave consideration and careful scrutiny into the respectability of the promoters and directors. It is not a little matter when

regarded in the light in which the hard-striving, hand-to-mouth livers look at it. Just imagine the consternation—the benumbing despair—of the deceived depositors should it happen with them on a Christmas eve as it did with another class of ruined investors on a certain Black Friday! Unsuspicious of anything wrong they have gone the length, maybe, of even laying in the ingredients for savoury "stuffing," and then they set out for the club, making, oh so sure, and lo! they find the shutters up and a written notice posted—"In consequence of circumstances over which he has no control, the manager regrets to announce that the distribution of geese is postponed until further notice." The bare idea of such a catastrophe is enough to make the most confiding hesitate, and to eventually decide that since goose it must be, it will be better, all inconveniences notwithstanding, to have the live bird in hand a month or two before it is required, and fatten it for killing.

At all events, and in whatever way may have originated the novel idea of hoarding and boarding a goose at home, and, as it were, paying the expenses to the creature itself instead of to the club, the movement has given rise to the establishment of a market of such a remarkable kind that nothing will be lost if the attention of the sanitary authorities, and perhaps that of the officers of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as well, is hereby directed towards it. Except to the initiated it is not easy to find. In the immediate neighbourhood of Bishopsgate Street Without, and lying eastward between that busy thoroughfare and Bethnal Green, is a network of squalid streets that time out of mind have been a disgrace to the parish that owns them, as being the scene of a sort of exchange or market for all manner of "live stocks" dear to the fancy—the fanciers in attendance being the ruffian element drawn from all parts of London, and on the morning of Sunday, of all days of the week. An addition has recently been made to the live stock business done in this detestable Sabbath-day market, and it now includes transactions in poultry.

It, no doubt, is difficult to satisfactorily define what is cruelty to an animal such as to call for the interference of the law, but the merely moderately compassionate person

must pity the wretched ducks and geese housed for sale in these filthy back-street little hovels. One is accustomed to associate the existence of the feathered creatures in question with rural scenes—with grassy meads and breezy commons, and with the sedgy pond in which they love to disport, and in which their bright and sprucely preened plumage is reflected. Here, in these noisome slums, are snow-white geese changed to dingy grey already, and all smeared and smudged by contact with the dirty fist of those who handle them; higgledy-piggledy closely wedged altogether in crates, in boxes, and baskets, and in the cramped wired-in space between the window board and the slushy pavement. Should an unfortunate bird in its struggles for a little breathing-space chance to displace its wing from the natural position, so it must remain, like a wing broken, thrust up and all askew, until the goose seller, stirring up his stock with a broom-handle (that they may by their loud complaining voices advertise their whereabouts), gives every bird a chance of recovering, at its neighbour's expense, a bearable position. They are dull-eyed and feverish-looking, and their dry, hot feet find no comfort on the dirty boards of the den in which they are confined.

It needs no knowledge of bird language to understand what it is the miserable creatures are asking for so incessantly—it is for water. They raise their harsh cry and put up their beaks as though beseeching for rain. The grimy bird-shop man having his attention called to this, desists from his occupation of bracing a bulfinch, and offers the pent-up geese water from a half-gallon beer can. They nearly dislocate their necks, thrusting them, half-a-dozen together, between the same two bars to get at the precious refreshment, but what is such a beak wetting compared with freedom in a field in a steady downpour of delicious rain? It is sufficiently painful to note the nervousness and fright of the poor little song birds, but, perhaps, of that morning's catching and fresh from the meadows, immured here in their narrow prisons, and beating the bars with their impatient wings, but somehow these poor uncouth geese and ducks, stifled and penned in in a manner so abhorrent to their nature, seemed to demand one's foremost sympathy.

May be, however, it was a foreboding of the unhappy future of these wretched birds that caused one to pity them so much. It was not until the matter was contemplated from this point of view that its monstrous and cruel absurdity became fully manifest. It is easy enough to understand the propriety of any poor fellow residing in the suburbs, and with a few yards of garden ground attached to his domicile, hankering after a live goose, with an eye to the delights of watching it grow plump and plumper under his fostering care; but what on earth can a man who resides with his family in one room, or at most in two rooms, not in the country, but up some alley, with but bare room to the paved back yard for the dust bin and the water butt—what does he want with a live goose or a pair of ducks? What are his intentions towards his wretched purchase when he gets home? Bad enough the Bethnal Green bird shop, with its deadly atmosphere and its stifling odours, but at least, there was companionship in prison; and with geese, as well as men, this is something, depend on it. What, however, can be conceived as more deplorable than the condition of a goose or a duck housed of nights in a cupboard where the coals are kept, and made the pet and plaything of the children through the day.

"But, surely," the reader may remark, "it may be safely trusted that folk who buy geese know how they should be treated." Surely not; no man who knows how a goose should be treated would tie it up neck and heels in a bundle handkerchief as he would a coat or a pair of trousers, as may be seen any Sunday morning in Schlater Street: while from stout sacks and bags, carried on the shoulders of men and boys, there are emitted suffocating sounds, in the midst of which feeble quacking may be made out, and which tell but too plainly of the popular impression that being possessed merely of beaks and not regular noses, geese and ducks could live as well without breathing as with. Probably these mistakes arise from ignorance rather than from a brutal disregard for the feelings of the dumb creatures, but since this buying of geese and ducks to carry home and fatten for Christmas is a business which just now seems to concern hundreds of people, and that however they may treat them when they

get them to their abodes, the ways described are those commonly adopted in conveyance thither, it might be worth the while of the secretary to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to make a little inquiry into the subject.

A PAWNBROKER'S CHRISTMAS EVE.

MR. BALCHIN'S neighbourhood is not exactly poverty-stricken —that is to say, it is not hopelessly and helplessly paralysed in the miry ways of squalor, with its arms and hands so long stretched out imploring charity, that those useful members have stiffened in that humiliating position, and are no more available for honest labour, or anything but begging. As all well know, there *are* neighbourhoods so unfortunately circumstanced; but Mr. Balchin's is not one of them. His neighbourhood is poor enough in all conscience; but its poverty is one of the toilsome, drudging, honest sort.

It is a mixed population amongst which Mr. Balchin is fixed, consisting chiefly of working jewellers and tailors, artificial florists, and makers of fancy goods, who as a rule work at home, and whose means of existence are at best precarious. This being the case, it is not surprising that Mr. Balchin does a brisk stroke of business in the pawnbroking line. He is so good as to lend money on their clothing, their household goods, and their tools. It is on pledges of the last-mentioned sort that Mr. Balchin's knowledge of the condition of those about him is mainly founded. Part of his business is to study these matters; as, for instance, he informs me, the greater part of his customers are "regulars"—that is to say, those who as a rule, redeem on Saturday night, out of the week's earnings, all that they have been compelled to pawn since the preceding Monday.

It is chiefly the Sunday clothing that is thus temporarily mortgaged; and I have a respectable tradesman's word that, in "no end of cases," the money advanced is more than equal to the value of the pledges deposited. "It is easily enough explained," said Mr. Balchin. "Say a suit is brought to us, and it being worth the money, we lend 15s. on it—as it's used only once a week, its value does not very rapidly depreciate, and we go on lending 15s. on its being brought to us

punctually every Monday morning, while those who bring it depend on the sum of 15s., as though it was money earned. Very likely it's all laid out beforehand for rent and one thing and another, and they need every sixpence of it. It is a terrible blow to them when, in right down self-defence, we are obliged to cut down the advance from 15s. to 12s. I assure you, my dear sir, we dare not do it suddenly. We are obliged to break it to them gently; to point out to them the increasing greasiness of the coat collar, and the fraying out of the trouser legs, and to impress on them to prepare for a reduction in the amount next week, or, at the very farthest, the week following that.

"Perhaps," continued Mr. Balchin, whose chokeful warehouses I was inspecting with him as he talked, "I may haves at the present time, twelve or fourteen hundred pound, invested in such goods. It is all right when they take 'em out on Saturday and bring 'em back on Monday; but if anything happens, and they are not able to redeem, where am I? There is one thing, I always know when there is a screw getting loose, and that is when the regular pledges show uneasiness in flowing out, and tools begin to flow in. It's a fatal sign, that is. First come those tools of the finer kind which at a push may be spared; and if the pawning stops at them, there may be a chance of the hard time tiding over; but if in a week or so the coarse tools come in, then I know that there's a dead block, and that the Sunday suits are likely to lie in limbo for a considerable time, even if they are ever redeemed at all. I know as well as possible how matters stand with 'em, You come to me and ask, 'How's the artificial flower trade in your neighbourhood?' How's the fancy box business?' or 'How are things going in the tailoring way?' I turn over the leaves of the pledge-book for a few weeks past, and am able to tell you exactly."

On this sure foundation of knowledge did Mr. Balchin make the gratifying statement that it is many a year, taking the season of Christmas, since poor hard-working people were so easily circumstanced. "I don't know," said he, "to what to attribute it; possibly it is the continuance of mild weather, but it is a positive fact that my books are within twenty pounds as clear of tools as they were in July."

"And have you found a corresponding diminution in the number of your 'regular' weekly pledges?" I asked.

"No," returned Mr. Balchin, in a comfortable tone of satisfaction; "they never diminish, no matter what amount of prosperity there is. They get into the habit of coming here, you see; and habits are not easily cured when they grow on one. We are very full just now, but I reckon on having a grand clear out before we put up the shop shutters, to-night. It is not often that I am mistaken, and I have a fancy that we shall have as hot a Christmas Eve delivery as we have had ever since I have been established."

I was very glad to hear this; in the first place, because there could be no doubt that a "hot delivery" of pledged goods by poor folk on a Christmas Eve was comfortably indicative of warmly-clad shoulders on the morrow—to say nothing of the fair presumption that hot and jolly Christmas dinners would be more than usually prevalent; and in the second place, because, having promised myself the interesting sight of a Christmas Eve redemption, and arranged accordingly with Mr. Balchin, it was fortunate that the occasion promised to be of an exceptional sort.

At an early hour in the evening—as soon as it was dusk, in fact—the decks were cleared for the coming contest. In the warehouses on the floors above the shop there must have been thousands of bundles of all sorts and sizes, closely wedged into square wooden receptacles that covered the walls from floor to ceiling on every side, and in racks that extended across and across the rooms, with alleys no more than two feet wide between. Each bundle had its ticket hanging out, like a tale-telling tongue, revealing what was inside, together with particulars of the month and the day it was brought to pawn, who pawned it, and what was lent on it.

There were three of these floors, and the "spout" from the shop penetrated to the topmost. On every floor was a sharp and active youth, whose business it was to discover and send "down the spout" the ransomed bundles: and, besides, there was another, Beadle by name, a morose and moody boy, whose department was the cellar, and who was looked down upon by the young gentlemen of the spout as one of mean position, whose familiar advances it was the proper

thing to discourage. Besides those junior assistants there were the two young men, Joseph and Charles, besides Mr. Balchin himself in the shop. As for me, I was accommodated with a seat in the private parlour, where, through an opening in the wire blind, I was enabled to see the whole shop, and the boxes, with their occupants.

There were not many of the latter, however, at starting; and the business done with them was, as a rule, the reverse of pleasant to an eye-witness. Occasionally the door of a box would be opened, and would shut again with an independent kind of bang, heralding the arrival of a customer whose husband had made a good week, got his wages early, received perhaps a handsome Christmas-box over and above, and who had proudly come to "take out" to the extent of thirty shillings or so, including "earrings, 4s.," and "copper kettle, 5s." They were takers-out most of these early birds; but now and then, entering at a door that made no bang at all, and approaching the counter with a manner in painful contrast to that of the redeemer of the copper kettle would come an unfortunate with whom times were so desperately hard that the only way left for tiding over Christmas was a resort to the pawnshop.

Nor was it the act of pawning at such a time, so much as the articles they brought to pawn, that excited one's commiseration for them. There was one man, a dreadfully pale and thin poor fellow, who produced from his pockets and his hat, and laid on the counter, three common little pictures in their shabby frames, a crockery figure of Garibaldi, and two other chimney ornaments of a similar kind.

"Eighteenpence," suggested the pale man, in a mild tone.

"Can't take' em in," remarked the matter-of-fact Joseph, flicking Garibaldi's head with his finger and thumb, evidently suspecting that he was cracked. "What's the use of bringing such rubbish here?"

"Couldn't you make 'em half—couldn't you say ninepence?" urged the pale man, with a dismal alteration in his voice, "only ninepence, come!" But Joseph was a young fellow who had served an apprenticeship to pawnbroking, and, as a matter of business, his heart was steeled against the appeals of the poverty-stricken.

"I couldn't make 'em fourpence. I wouldn't give house-room to such trumpery," he lightly replied, pushing the "trumpery" back in a heap, and giving his attention to the next customer.

"God forbid, my lad, that you should ever need a shilling as sorely as I do this night!" said the pale man, in a shaky voice; then he gathered up the chimney-ornaments and the paltry little pictures and took his departure, to find, I hope, better luck elsewhere. I wouldn't have been Joseph, and had those bitter words addressed to me for all the money in Mr. Balchin's till. But Joseph was used to this sort of thing. Scarcely had the pale man gone when a poor woman came in with a cotton gown to pawn. She had an old shawl wrapped about her, and as she reached over to place the bundle on the counter, I saw that her arm was naked to the shoulder. Joseph narrowly examined the gown about the body part.

"You have been washing it in a hurry, haven't you?" he remarked; "it's hardly dry yet."

"It was on my back two hours ago," replied the woman, "and it was either take it off and bring it here, or let the young 'uns go without a bit of grub to-morrow."

"It's a confounded nuisance, you know," remarked Joseph, folding up the gown.

"Ah! well, never mind; p'raps I ought to thank God that I've got a gown to pawn," said the poor soul.

"I meant it was a nuisance that it is damp," remarked Joseph the unsentimental; "the blessed things go mildewed, and so we lose by 'em;" and then, with a professional dexterity, he made the gown into a roll not larger than a German sausage, pinned a ticket to it, threw it under the counter, and airily pitched two separate shillings towards the gownless woman, who hurried off to make the best of them, I suppose, in the shape of the "bit of grub" for the next day, which was Christmas.

There was a good many others who responded to Joseph's repeated "Any one want to leave?" but, except the two cases I have described, and two others, there was nothing remarkable about them. One of those last mentioned was that of a woman smelling horribly of rum, who came stag-

gering in with two pairs of tiny boots—the mud still wet upon them—to pawn, and who, I was glad to see, was promptly ejected from the premises, muddy boots and all, by Mr. Balchin himself. The other case was that of an old woman who was in the singular dilemma of wishing to pawn her wedding ring, worn almost as thin as a thread, but who could not get it over her bony old knuckle. Her "old man" was coming out of the hospital that night, she said, having lain there ten weeks with a broken leg; there was nothing at home to eat; and she had turned the matter over "in her conscience" whether it was more wicked to take off her ring and pawn it—having nothing else in the world left to pawn—or to keep it on and let her "old man" go without a bit of dinner on Christmas for the first time in their married lives.

The worst of it was that, having decided which was the lesser wickedness, she couldn't get the ring off. Joseph tried, but also failed, and, after his customary practical manner, expressed an opinion that it would have to be buried with her. "But if it was off, what could you lend me on it?" the poor woman asked. Joseph turned about the bony old finger, and finally said that he could go as high as two shillings. I must confess that I had my doubts about the old woman. It seemed so very like an artful Christmas Eve tale got up to impose on Mr. Balchin, or on some kindly-disposed customer who might happen to be in the shop at the time. I did the good old soul injustice, however. In less than a quarter of an hour she was back again, looking triumphant—although her finger was bound up in a bit of rag—and laid the ring on the counter. It is not too often that I give away half-crowns, goodness knows, and Mr. Balchin, to whom appeal was made on the matter, was seriously opposed to such an unbusiness-like interference; while as for Joseph, his sense of the ludicrous was so immensely tickled, that he could scarcely hold a pen steady enough to make out tickets for ten minutes afterwards. But he was *not* called on to make out one for that brave old woman.

As the evening advanced, business grew brisker and brisker. Mr. Balchin had now divested himself of his coat,

and his two young men had followed his example. The doors of the various compartments no longer by their banging announced the entrance of some fresh customer, for the crowd in every case extended through the doorway, and out into the passage beyond. There were six boxes, and at least five-and-twenty persons in each. The cry was no longer, "Who wants to leave?"—the time for "leaving" had passed, and redemption alone was the order of the night.

Mr. Balchin was right in his prognostication that he should have a hot night of it. It *was* hot, literally as well as figuratively, and the atmosphere was rendered none the more pleasant by the strong flavour of spirituous liquors with which it was impregnated. It was a marvel how the pawnbroker and his assistants preserved their equanimity. Nine out of every ten men, women, and children were clamouring to be served, bewailing the length of time they had been already obliged to wait, pushing and jostling and mercilessly elbowing each other in the narrow spaces to get closer to the counter, and throwing out their arms, every fist grasping one, two, or half a dozen "tickets," while all in the same breath called out for Joseph and Charles. The wonder was that these two enduring mortals were not distracted and rendered incapable of any manner of business. It was easy enough to see how the least hitch in the methodical manner in which the pledges were delivered would lead to inextricable confusion. Had Mr. Balchin or either of his young men been taken suddenly unwell, or had one or the other active youths who officiated in the mysterious upper chambers through which the convenient "spout" penetrated struck work, and at that time quitted his employment without notice, it is impossible to say what the result would have been. Even as it was, the women in the back-ground did not scruple to launch withering sarcasms at both Joseph and Charles for their alleged want of alacrity, at the same time suggesting many ingenious —and, in some instances, painful—devices for prevailing on them to move a little quicker. Some, on the other hand, tried soft persuasion, and even wheedling—calling on the young men as good souls, as dears, and even as "ducks," to take the tickets from their outstretched hands. But Joseph and Charles

were as proof against blandishment as the flat-irons they from time to time handed over. "When the boys throw down the batch they've got tickets for, there'll be another lot of tickets sent up, and not before; so it's no use making a bother about it." "Then why don't you stir up the lazy varmint?" Occasionally, one of the hard-worked youths, so disrespectfully stigmatised, in the pursuit of his legitimate business, let himself down the spout instead of a bundle, and, even while no more than the calves of his legs and his slippers were yet visible, he was made the target for universal execration; and "Wake up, wooden head!" "Pull yourself together, lazybones!" "Keep your eyes open, spoony!" were amongst the mildest counsels gratuitously administered.

But the individual who came in for the greatest share of abuse was the youth I have already mentioned, whose dismal occupation it was to rescue ransomed goods from some place in the bowels of the earth, an entrance thereto being effected by means of a trap-door in the floor of the shop, which, as it was in the common path, was kept shut except when in actual use. He was a bulky and well-fed looking boy, of grimy aspect, wearing a black apron with a bib tied over his buttoned-up coat, and a close-fitting cap of the Glengarry sort. An affable boy enough, I dare say, when undisturbed by the worries of business, but sulkily—I am afraid malignantly—disposed towards his enemies when they exasperated him beyond endurance. Heavy goods seemed to be peculiar to his department; pots and kettles, fenders, fire-irons, cumbersome articles of crockery, &c., and such other kinds of pledges as would be none the worse for underground stowage. To be sure, the goods it was his business to discover and haul to the surface were heavy, and sometimes awkward to carry; and I cannot say what was the extent of the subterranean passages he had to explore by the light of the lantern attached by a strap to his waist. But I am bound to confess that impatient customers might be excused if they thought that the lapse of time that occurred between each descent and reappearance was in the least degree unnecessary. Discovering that the method adopted by the shopmen to expedite this youth's movements

when down below was to stamp on the floor with the heels of their boots, the crowd in the boxes occasionally did likewise. Then Beadle would make his appearance like an imp in a pantomime, scowling and glaring on his grinning persecutors, and looking as though nothing would afford him sweeter satisfaction than to have them one at a time at the foot of his cellar stairs, while he hurled down on them the pots and kettles, the pudding basins, plates, and baking dishes they had come to redeem, and were making such a fuss about.

It is only right, however, to mention that there were extenuating circumstances for his sourness of temper; not the most insignificant being, that the trap was always shut when he was coming out, and as he usually had both his arms full, there was nothing left for him but to butt up the heavy wooden flap with the crown of his head. They laughed at him then. Beadle's time for laughing was when he had relieved himself of his load, and was entrusted with a fresh batch of tickets. It was not of the least use for Mr. Balchin to call out, "And be quick about it!" Had Beadle been descending to a dungeon for life, he could not have more lingeringly halted on each stair, meanwhile steadily eyeing his persecutors; when his nose was on a level with the flooring he paused anew, deliberately closed his eyes and nodded, then opened his eyes again, and maliciously winked, thereby meaning to convey that it was his intention to have a comfortable nap as soon as ever he reached his den, after which, if he found it convenient, he might search for their goods.

Nevertheless, the exchange of bundles for money went forward with amazing rapidity. Every ten minutes or so, either Charles or Joseph would call out "Now for tickets!" and, beginning at the last box, would gather with amazing dexterity, using both his hands, the plentiful crop of dirty little bits of pasteboard that were eagerly thrust forward by scores of dirtier hands. When he had thus operated on the six boxes, he took the double handful of tickets to the spout, thrust them into a bag hanging there, and tugged at a bell. Up flew the bag by the string, and in a minute or so the big and little bundles to which the tickets referred came

tumbling down till the throat of the spout was fairly choked.

Then came the job of calling out the names on the bundles, the most formidable part of the business appearing to be the number of bundles that belonged to one person. It was no uncommon thing, when Charles called out, "Sweeny, how many?" to hear the voice of Sweeny shrilly respond, "Seven;" and that number of bundles had to be separately put aside before the Sweeny delivery could take place. They were not much to look at, these bundles: but one might gain some idea of their value by a glance at the till, as big as a Christmas punchbowl, which before eleven o'clock was piled to brimming-over with silver money, and even then the value of the bundles was by no means exactly ascertained. No one could correctly estimate the real value of the mean-looking bundles but their owners, who knew what treasures their shabby envelopes covered—the Sunday-frocks of their children, their warm and comfortable under-clothing; mother's best gowns, in which she takes pardonable pride; father's hard-earned decent broadcloth suit—one and all "put away" in a time of need, but on Christmas Eve joyfully redeemed. The wearing of those rescued treasures would certainly be not the least satisfactory feature of the morrow's enjoyment. If any of Mr. Balchin's customers were disappointed, it was no fault of him or of his assistants. So manfully had they stuck to their task, that by eleven o'clock the last batch of tickets had been collected, the shower of bundles down the spout became a mere fitful pattering and then stopped entirely, and the vengeful Beadle, emerging sooty and savage from his cellar, received orders to put up the shutters.

OUT WITH THE WAITS.

It was verging towards twelve o'clock when, by appointment, I met my three friends, the flageolet, the cornopean, and the trombone, in the neighbourhood of the "Elephant and Castle."

My object in desiring to spend a few hours in the company of these midnight musicians may be stated in a few words. In the first place, I felt curious to satisfy myself as to the truth of an ominous whisper, the increasing prevalence of which had for some time caused me uneasiness, to the effect that Englishmen, and especially Londoners, were growing indifferent to that venerable institution, Christmas waits; that, though its unimpeachable respectability protected it against open hostility, and though in certain quarters it was still tolerated, and to some extent favoured, this was in a spirit far different from bygone feelings, and rather out of pity for its grey hairs and tottering steps, and the conviction that it had but a little while to live. It was represented to me that, except in rare instances, Christmas waits proper had ceased to exist years ago; that the instrumentalists who now affected nocturnal performances towards the end of December had thrown over all pretence to pious motive, and aspired to nothing more sublime and soul-stirring than the favourite airs of the sentimental ballads of the Christy Minstrels; that lively music-hall hilarity of the "Slap bang, here we are again" type was found to be more profitable playing, and more in accordance with popular taste, than the sweet-old hymn music with which, one time o'day—or rather night—sleepers were awakened to be reminded that the greatest of all days of Christian thanksgiving was at hand.

Again it had always been a puzzle to me how Christmas waits ever could make the business pay. One can understand strolling musicians, even those unmusical vagabonds, the German bandits, picking up a living of some sort in the

day-time, and on the system of prompt payment; but the waits are compelled to give credit. Night after night, for ten or a dozen nights, they turn out at an hour when even the public-houses are closed, and nobody is abroad but penniless, homeless wanderers and the police; and they play to houses wrapped in darkness, and to people who, for all they can know to the contrary, are fast asleep, and who, on that ground, may justly repudiate the debt accumulating against them.

Then, again, there is the serious drawback of not being able to call for payment until Christmas and its sentimental thoughts are things of the past, and when the wind and the snow are beating in at the street door, meekly knocked at by the red-nosed Trombone, who presents his instrument that you may see for yourself that he is no impostor, and who mildly reminds you that "about ten days afore you took in a card with the names of him and other waits on it." It is a much quicker operation to shut the door, dismissing the man with a brief "No," than to ask him into the passage while you go and make inquiries. But then, if it is such a doubtful speculation, how is it that it has been in modern times taken up by such shrewd and wide-awake people as those who cater for the people in the "Slap-bang" line?

The mystery seemed to me worth solving, and on that account I did not so much mind the marrow-chilling mixture of snow and rain that blew into my eyes and ears as I greeted my friends in Newington Causeway. And I had the more reason to congratulate myself on my present opportunity, inasmuch as it happened that my newly-found acquaintances were waits of the kind that are said to be becoming extinct. Before I had been in Mr. Weevil's company five minutes—Weevil was the flageolet and leader—indeed, while we were standing under a gateway, and fortifying against the weather's inclemency by a pull at my flask—I was duly informed that, please goodness, while he was a wait, he would "stick to the tex' as waits took their rise from," and that he could no more make up his mind to be guilty of the goings-on of some fellows who called themselves waits, than he could to lead a church choir with the music of the bones and banjo.

From the "Elephant and Castle" we struck into the New Kent Road, and "worked" the small streets to the left of that thoroughfare, it being Mr. Weevil's belief—derived, I suppose, from experience—that the sort of people here were more free with their contributions than those who were well-to-do. I must confess, however, that I did not find it very cheering at first. Five times did we make a "pitch" in the wind and the deadly-cold sleet, playing our three tunes: "Hark! the herald angels," "Lo, He comes," &c., and "While shepherds watched." Five times did Mr. Weevil, tucking his flageolet in at the breast of his coat, and making a speaking trumpet of both his hands, deliver himself of his blessing and exhortation: "God bless you all, both great and small; A merry Christmas you befall. Remember the poor waits when they call. Nigh one o'clock and a boisterous morning." Five times, I say, was this ceremony repeated without so much as a light appearing at a window, or a passer-by bestowing on us a single copper. But this was nothing, Mr. Weevil said. They seldom or never did get anything till Boxing Day.

"And how much do you hope to get then?" I asked.

"Why, a matter of four pun' ten or five pound atwixt us," replied the old gentleman, looking radiant in the light of the street-lamp, and with the rain dripping from his nose on to his flageolet.

"To say nothing of the drink," remarked the Trombone, who was a short, thick-set man, lame of a leg, and with a twinkling eye; "Lor help you, you might swim in it, if you had a mind to."

Nevertheless, and despite the last-mentioned collateral advantage, I could not understand that thirty shillings for ten nights' work was very splendid remuneration for being a "Wait," in the cold, and the rain, and the wind. At our sixth "pitch," however, we did a little better. There were lights in the windows of the house, and enough could be seen of its interior to make known that it was a laundry, and that the ironers, late as it was, were still at work. We played out three tunes, and Mr. Weevil had just began "God bless you all," when a stout lady, with shiny arms, and her head enveloped in an ironing-blanket, ran out to the gate.

She beckoned Mr. Weevil. "Would them two trumpets mind leaving off while you play 'Home, sweet home,' on your flute?" she asked. Mr. Weevil was about, I think, to decline, when his nostrils, as well as ours, were assailed by the fragrant fumes of hot coffee issuing from the door, which stood ajar. He hesitated. "I've got a son that's gone to Kennedy, and he used to play it on his flute! I wish you would," pleaded the old lady; "come in and do it, and them other three can have a warm at the ironing stove." This was a temptation too great to be resisted. I don't know much about the flute myself, but I declare if Mr. Weevil had refused, I felt so benumbed with cold, that I verily believe I should have borrowed his instrument, and struggled through "Home, sweet home" somehow, for the sake of a warm. But Mr. Weevil was merely human. The tune, strictly speaking, was not according to "tex'," yet we all four went in, and, before an audience of five grinning young ironers, "Home, sweet home" was played, after which the benevolent laundress, besides sixpence, gave us a big yellow jug full of coffee, out of which we gratefully drank and drank about, and then turned into the night again quite cheerfully.

It was now getting towards two o'clock, and our "round" took a turn that to me appeared by no means promising. We entered a dingy narrow thoroughfare somewhere at the rear of St. George's Church in the Borough; a mean little street, the shabbiness of the houses of which the mantle of night could not conceal. Nevertheless, from some cause or other, it was not deemed prudent to trust it to the guardianship of a single police-constable. We met two stalwart fellows of the "Force" shoulder to shoulder, tramping leisurely in the roadway, and occasionally with their "bulls'-eyes" flashing a hint of their presence in the dingy houses to the left and the right. It was not quite dark, however, leaving the bulls'-eyes out of the question. Before at least half-a-dozen of the houses, thrust out from the fan-light over the door, or suspended from a bar after the manner of a public-house sign, was a lamp inscribed with an intimation that "lodgings" might there be obtained.

There was a lack of uniformity about these lamps that

was peculiarly striking. They were lamps of the oil-burning kind, all of them; one being the mere iron frame of the original structure, walled in with part of an old newspaper, and inscribed with letters evidently cut out of some wall placard, to the effect that at that establishment "Logins for Travillirs" might be procured at the rate of "4d. a nite, with cooking and blacking brushes"—the latter, I suppose, being a rare and exceptional domestic convenience provided for the accommodation of lodgers who were desirous of turning out genteelly in the morning. There was a doctor's lamp, an appalling thing of oval shape, looking in the distance like a monstrous head with sea-green cheeks and forehead, and with flaming red eyes which blinked and winked on the hanging board inscribed "lodgings here at 3d. a night," in such a scowling and ruffianly manner as to make it seem a marvel that, even at this low figure, people were courageous enough to risk their lives in such a den.

A few doors further was quite a rustic contrivance, intended, it may be presumed, to appeal especially to tramps newly arrived from the agricultural districts. It was an old-fashioned waggon lantern, latticed with rusty iron and glazed with horn, with a steeple roof, and a door with a latch; and, in the loop of the latch, just as a rustic swain wears a nosegay in his buttonhole, there was stuck quite a handsome sprig of mistletoe. A tallow sallow candle, flickering and flaring in the lantern's interior, revealed the fact that this was Blisterchick's lodging-house, and that it was open at all hours.

Was this Blisterchick's ordinary advertisement, or did it mean at this festive season the hospital lodging-house-keeper kept open doors and by this cheerful sign of the mistletoe sprig, desired it to be known that even tramps and other folks so poor that threepence was all they could afford to pay for a night's lodging need not despair of Christmas entertainment? Was there to be revelry at Blisterchick's on Christmas Day, and were the lean tables in the great kitchen on which on every other day throughout the year appeared no more sumptuous fare than the humble rasher or the appetising bloater—were these same modest boards to creak under mighty dishfuls of roast and boiled Blister-

chick bounty, his annual Christmas-box to his friends and patrons?

The idea went well with the lantern. All honour to the festive Blisterchick! And at that very moment there came along the street a woman whose clothes were a mere bundle of rags, carrying at her back a year-old youngster, whose blue arms encircled its mother's throat, and held on by her bonnet strings. Besides this one, the woman led another child by the hand. She hesitated, then paused at Blisterchick's door, and knocked. A fat, dirty old woman, with a greasy old cotton handkerchief over her head and a sackcloth apron with a bib to it—you could see all this quite plainly, for she came to the door with a lighted candle in her hand—appeared; and of her the woman with the children asked a question. Whatever it was, it was in so low and humble a tone as to be quite inaudible to one standing just a few yards away, but it was easy enough to hear the dirty, fat woman's reply—far easier than to print it in its entirety. "What next?" exclaimed the fat woman ferociously, and with an oath she slammed the door in the poor soul's face, with such a vengeance as to set the latticed lantern swinging at a rate that threatened to dislodge the sprig of mistletoe.

If this was not Mrs. Blisterchick who had opened the door, she was evidently the presiding genius of the establishment; and it was equally certain that it was not *she* who had adorned the lantern. Perhaps some market gardener, lumbering that way the night before on his holly-and-mistletoe-laden cart, had conceived the grim joke of sticking the sprig there, little dreaming of the treacherous beacon he was planting. Of course it is impossible for me, since I did not hear her words, to say what the poor wayfarer with the two small children asked the dirty old fat woman for. Perhaps she simply wished to be informed if her husband was there; perhaps she sought to know whether she was on the right road for Dartford; still it is not improbable that she might have been as much taken in by that bit of mistletoe as I was. She may not have thought, a moment before, of knocking at Blisterchick's door; but, spying the emblem of peace and goodwill, sudden hope may have leapt to her desolate heart.

"Here's a Godsend!" she may have said to herself, as she caught sight of the mystic green and the snowy berries. "They must at least be cheery-hearted folk who hang *that* out in a place like this; here goes to try my good luck this bitter night, at all events. And she raps at the door, and out bursts hideous old Mother Blisterchick, uglier than any ogress in a story book. "Go to the devil," says she, and bangs the door; and the poor soul, without a word, creeps away and is gradually lost in the bleak dark, just as the Hautboy, having extracted his nose from his comforter, pathetically pipes up "While shepherds watched their flocks by night."

The reason why this villanous street was included in our round, as I am informed by the Cornopean, is that the landlady of the "Kilkenny Cats," the most flourishing public-house in the neighbourhood, is a devout believer in "Waits," and is undoubtedly "good" for half-a-crown and a quart of egg-hot when they call on her on Boxing Day. The "Kilkenny Cats," is not many steps from Blisterchick's, but it exhibits no light, and with its flashy lamps and gilded boards, and the recent imprint of human feet in mud and sawdust on its threshold, has a stark and stricken-suddenly-dead aspect that is not easy to describe. An emblem of the last evil act it committed before departing this life appeared in the shape of a "navvy" lying at full length on the wooden cellar-flap, with some bacon and a cabbage tied in a bundle-handkerchief, hugged affectionately to his breast, and serving him in part as a pillow. The navvy rouses at the first strains of "While shepherds watched," &c., and hiccups some drunken words to the sacred tune, and drums with his hob-nailed heels on the cellar flap. The solemn slowness of the music, however, presently excites his wrath: and, ferociously addressing Mr. Weevil, he requests him to "chuck it out livelier," unless he wants his precious ribs stove in. This unreasonable demand not being complied with, the navvy scrambles to his feet, and, using awful language, makes a vicious lunge at the Flageolet, but, missing him and staggering past him, he happily keeps on, balancing himself and maintaining an erect posture, solely by virtue of the bundle, which he skilfully manœuvres as a

counter-weight, and so vanishes. I remarked to the old gentleman, who had so narrowly escaped assault and battery, that the inhabitants of the neighbourhood did not seem to possess a particularly keen appreciation for sacred music.

"I'd sooner play to the beasts in the Sirlogical Gardens," he replied; "but being the wust of the wust, I s'pose we must make some allowance for them."

"And so you consider the people hereabout the worst of the worst?"

"I'd wager a guinea, if I had one," the old flageolet-player whispered back in confidence, "that there isn't a house on either side of the way, from top to bottom, that doesn't contain a convicted thief. Bless you! there's none but thieves, and bad women, and tramps, and cadgers, and bullies live about here."

One not unfrequently hears of folk such as those mentioned by he venerable "Wait" being converted from their ways of sin by means less potent than that of a sacred message of mercy and forgiveness sounding in guilty ears suddenly awakened in the middle of the quiet night; but if any such result attended our humble ministrations, I am scarcely in a position to say that I was aware of it. To be sure, one never can tell; and it is especially hard to form a judgment in the case of persons so peculiarly constituted as were those inhabiting the houses about us. It is a fact that, in three or four instances, late stragglers, returning from God only knows what manner of occupation to their lodgings in this vile street, caught up the tune that was being played, and softly whistled it to themselves as they came shuffling along with their coats tight-buttoned, their collars upturned, and their hat or cap pulled down low—for the double purpose possibly of screening their features from the observations of a too attentive police, and protecting their unhappy noses from the biting wind that was blowing. One of these, arrived at his door, did not at once enter, but pulling up his jacket collar yet a little higher, stood in the shadow, as though with some idea that it would be a pity to be shut in from sharing in a real bit of Christmas, and favoured us with a whistling accompaniment to "Lo, He comes!" to its very end; although he was driven by stress of weather, poor fellow,

to utilise his musical effort by blowing on his benumbed fingers, in order to impart a little warmth into them.

On the other hand, one inhabitant—the fact of his keeping a small beer-shop exactly opposite the flourishing "Kilkenny Cats," to the proprietress of which our efforts were mainly directed, may have had to do with it—waxed wroth at our music. He flung up his window with a furious bang, and appearing at the opening with his night-cap on, and with a patchwork counterpane huddled over his shoulders, swore in horrible terms that if we did not that instant "sling our Daniels"—which the Trombone informed me was a Sludge Street equivalent for moving off—he would "shy" at us every heavenly article of crockery his apartment contained.

There was a woman, too. She came up Sludge Street in a condition of reckless and defiant intoxication, her wretched finery, and the profuse display of flower and feather in her bonnet sufficiently denoting the class to which she belonged. I don't quite remember the tune we were at the moment playing; but whatever it might have been, she took offence at it. She stood still a little time and then listened, and then she broke out with tremendous ferocity, "It's all cant and lies," she cried, raising her voice almost to a shriek, at the same time leaning her unsteady body against the shutters of an oil-shop to enable her to stamp with her feet, "it is all lies and cant—all rot, all cheat; and you ought to be pole-axed, you hoary-headed old thief," she continued, addressing the meek Flageolet, "for helping to put it about. Ha! ha! who believes *that?*"—she knew the words of the tune, it seemed. "Do I believe it, do you think? Look at me," and as she shrieked forth the words, she stretched out her arms, at the same time spreading her shawl, and in the semi-darkness, giving herself an appearance of some evil angel. "Look at me, and then talk of saving. I'm miles too low down to be hooked up again; and there's thousands with me—millions; you whining old Methodist, I am going to—— straight, I tell you: and I mean to lush well along the road." And then, with a shout of wild laughter, she staggered off, her draggletails flapping in the wind.

I did not see what became of her. My impression was that she entered one of the houses, or turned into one of

the abounding arched alleys with which both sides of the road were pierced. She did not go far, anyhow. In less than ten minutes, quite suddenly she appeared again, scarcely staggering at all now, and walking fast. She made straight for Mr. Weevil, and, plucking one of his hands from his instrument before he could recover from his amazement, thrust into his palm and pressed his fingers over the sum of fourpence-halfpenny in coppers. "I was drunk just now," she remarked, quietly. "Thank'ee kindly, missus," replied the forgiving Flageolet. "Don't thank me—hit me," cried the woman, growing excited again; "strike me down into the mud, and tread on me. Stamp me down into the ground and bury me. I would be a good riddance, for I'm no good alive—no good, no good." And the strange creature flitted away again, still wailing "no good," in such a despairing tone that we hadn't the pluck to stay in Sludge Street any longer. So we took a turning, and thereby got back into the Borough again; and as, by this time, I had obtained the glimpse I wanted of the sort of existence which a "Wait" leads, I gladly hailed a passing hansom, shook hands with my grateful friends, and wished them good luck and better weather.

CHRISTMAS IN LIMBO.

It was a crisp and frosty Christmas morning, with a blue sky and a bright sun, and with just a sparkling sprinkle of last night's snow, giving a swept and garnished appearance to the streets, when a solitary pedestrian might have been observed proceeding hurriedly in a northern direction. He was not a man of cheerful mind. The unfashionable neighbourhood he traversed abounded with objects of seasonable interest, but it was evident that his mind was far removed from his surroundings. Stern duty impelled him. He had pledged his word to render himself at a certain place at a stated time, and his word was his bond however cruelly it might tether him. He was going to prison! It might have been worse, however. He (or I, for the two are identical) was not returning to limbo after a spell of temporary freedom on my own recognisances. I was on my way to visit an old friend. In a cheery little note the governor had advised me that my friend was in his keeping, and begged me, for old acquaintance sake, to come and see him. Not that he was in need of sympathy as a pining captive; on the contrary, he is known to be the jollies, rosiest, heartiest, merriest mortal alive—especially on his birthday. This was his birthday, and his name was Old Christmas. It is his privilege to reign supreme everywhere on the twenty-fifth of each December, and everywhere, of course, includes jails. My object in accepting the generous invitation was to ascertain by general observation whether a Christmas pudding retains its peculiar flavour when boiled in a prison copper, and whether the jovial old gentleman with the snowy beard and the crown of holly, took as kindly to his wassail when served in a stone jug (ghost of "Nix" and his "Dolly palls" forgive me) as when ladled from the orthodox punchbowl.

Gruesome looked the grey stone stronghold; nor did the

improve on closer acquaintance. So grudging of liberty was it, that the very knocker on the massive outer gate wore a sort of leg iron, which restricted its free action. Its fettered thud, however, reached the ears of the vigilant wicket keeper, and by an act of grim harlequinade, his bewhiskered visage appeared in lieu of six square inches of the seemingly solid door before me. Was the governor visible? Yes. He was expecting me. He was within the prison, and just about to commence his weekly inspection as to the personal cleanliness of the five hundred or so of male jail-birds he had in cage that jolly Christmas morning. "This way, sir!"

That way, and in less time than it takes a healthy pulse to beat thirty, we are in the regions of gloom, and our footsteps (or rather mine are—my guide wore a pair of what, in criminal phraseology, are known as "sneaks," and are shoes with canvas tops and indiarubber soles) are trespassing on a stillness instantly suggestive of death in the midst of life. A cheery old soul indeed must Christmas be if they can keep him here, even for the space of one short winter's day, and be none the worse for it! Black and white everywhere, and uncompromisingly blank and bare, and so dreadfully clean that a smutch of dirt somewhere, or a cobweb, would have been a relief to be thankful for. And all this being considered not enough to choke and muzzle and utterly subdue a disposition to gay gossip on the part of the beholder, whichever way the eyes were directed they encountered on a ground as sombre as a coffin lid, and in lank skeleton letters the word, SILENCE! There were mouths enough to make a noise had they dared. The governor had begun his inspections. All down the whole length of the corridor the door of each prisoner's cell was wide open, and stiffly upright as a sentry in a sentry box, square in the doorway, was the prisoner himself. God bless you, merry gentlemen—but here was something that might have you dismayed, however determinedly you had taken to heart the advice tendered in the carol. There was a frosty rime on each grated cell window, the size of the pavement plate opening to a coalcellar, and the vaulted roof and the narrow wall were white as snow, while the asphalte floor was black and glistening as a pool of ink, and there stood each prisoner bare-footed

and bare-legged as high as the knees, and with his checked shirt stripped back from his breast and shoulders. If I had resided in such a street, I think I should, under all circumstances, much have preferred occupying number one, than hermitage number fifty at the far end.

The governer wore a little sprig of holly in his coat buttonhole, in order, I suppose, that his bird might not forget the festive occasion. "You haven't washed your eyes clean, Ninety-nine," said he, smartly, addressing a middle aged, woe-begone wretch whose downcast vision was seemingly fixed on an upside-down governor reflected in the inky looking-glass he stood on, "what's the reason of that, Ninety-nine? On Christmas Day too!" The rebuked prisoner raised his eyes suddenly, and at the same instant appeared to try and gulp down a pill he had been holding in his tight shut mouth. "That's what it is," he presently answered, huskily, and as though the impediment, after all, had stuck in his gullet, "them at home. That's all, sir. Excuse me!" And the discipline of the jail compelling him to keep both his hands straight to his sides during parade, there was nothing to hinder the two great tears coursing down his face, and there they remained bedewing his grizzly beard during the remainder of the inspection. If Christmas was present at that moment—and, though by evidence, visual or nasal, could I have borne witness to it, since they "kept" him there, of course, he must have been—who can doubt but that he at once despatched one of his invisible agents to give that prisoner's family, at all events, some inkling of those twinkling drops—buds of promise of an amended future?

When we (the governor and I) had made sure that the privileges of the two-quart zinc bowl and the morsel of mottled soap had been dutifully exercised, we all went to chapel, a queerly-shaped hall attached to the prison, with plenty of elbow-room between each prisoner, and pulpit-like perches for the warders, who were well selected for the duty on account of their keenness of vision for detecting anything in the nature of dumb motions and for quick hearing; but other words than those in the hymn-book were sung out from one to another under cover of the

tune. Old Christmas was present. He was introduced by the chaplain in the guise of a sermon concerning the high moral advantages which attached to being on terms of peace and goodwill with all men. There was a double row of persons seated immediately in front of the governor's curtained pew, a show of distinction conferred on them on account of their especially ruffianly character, and I am afraid I lost a good bit of the sermon in speculating on how much of goodwill they felt for the two stalwart and determined prison officials who so unwinkingly watched over them. But it was hardly likely that of all days in the year they would misconduct themselves this morning. Towards the close of the sermon someone entered at a door, and as one man they sniffed and uttered a kind of aching sigh. They smelt it!

The service over, we (the governor, the chaplain and the heads of the establishment) went down in the kitchen and saw them dishing it up—the dinner I mean, of course. Ah! Christmas was here, sure enough. There was his beef, great piles of it, as one sees the great cubes of paving granite stocked by the roadside, tender and juicy, and deliciously brown, and all hot from the mighty ovens from which it had just been drawn. And the puddings! Was it possible to produce a genuine Christmas pudding from a prison copper? The proposition was satisfactorily solved, the instant I put my head into the kitchen door. "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," neither do the universally agreed on ingredients necessarily make a Christmas pudding. There is an aroma about the genuine article that only the generous breath of the King of Good-fellowship can impart to it, and it was here. It was so good that as we stood by the laden board in a spicy mist, we begged each a substantial taste from the scalesmen who weighed the rations, and smacked our lips over it, though it burnt our fingers to hold it. "Half-a-pound of roast beef (without bone), half-a-pound of pudding, a pound of mealy potatoes, and a bountiful helping of gravy for every occupant of a cell, and in less than twenty minutes from the time the potato nets were drawn from the cauldrons the whole five hundred were feeding.

With a difference, however. They were jail-birds every one, and none of them doves. At the same time it would be doing many an injustice to say that they were birds of a feather, and callous as carrion crows whence the food came, so long as it was good, and there was enough of it to warm their maw. In the panels of every cell door there is a tiny peep-hole with a slide that can be noiselessly pushed back, and my more delicate scruples being overcome by curiosity to see with what kind of appetite a dungeon captive can tackle his Christmas dinner, I did as I was invited, and here and there peeped in. In the majority of cases, I am bound to say, that the diners appeared not in the least dejected nor made miserable by the mystic influence of the season acting on their accusing conscience. Only they were a trifle more wolfish in the glare of their eyes and the champing of their jaws, this kind might for all the emotion they betrayed, have been seated at a cook-shop table, partaking of a meal freely ordered and honestly paid for.

But they were not invariably of this kind. I peeped in at number Ninety-nine, and the silly fellow's face was hidden in his hammock-rug, while his untasted beef and pudding was growing cold on the hinged board against the wall that served as a table. There was another man, quite a young fellow, who had some talent for drawing, and to comfort him in his solitude, he had drawn with pencil on paper portrait sketches of his wife and his two children. He had made up his mind for a dinner-party seemingly, for he had propped up his pictures on each side his plate; but he must have broken down at an early stage of the rash experiment, for the pile of food appeared to be undiminished, while the wretched artist, hiding his face in his hands, was sobbing like a schoolboy. This was the last prisoner I peeped at, and somehow I felt that I had enough of it, the impression I came away with being that, undoubtedly, Christmas in prison had a melancholy time of it.

THE END.

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Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018